

PRISONERS OF FEAR

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by

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With an Introduction by

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TO
MY LITTLE SON
ASKING HIM TO FORGIVE ME
THOSE YEARS OF MY ABSENCE

CONTENTS

Author's Preface	page ix
Introduction	xi
<i>Chapter I.</i> Personal Prelude	1
II. Journey to the Gates of Auschwitz	14
III. First Impressions	22
IV. The Organisation of a Women's Concentration Camp	38
V. Camp Hospital	54
VI. The Inferno	69
VII. The Prisoners	87
(a) The Germans	88
(b) The Poles	107
(c) The Russians	112
(d) The Jews	117
VIII. The German S.S.	129
IX. Interlude	156
X. Women's Working Party	164
XI. Dachau: End and Beginning	180

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

DURING THOSE seemingly endless years of imprisonment in a Nazi concentration camp, one of the sources of our determination to resist was the thought that we had to survive in order to be able to tell the world what we had seen and endured. After our liberation, when we read or heard the first accounts of Belsen and Buchenwald, Dachau and Theresienstadt, we felt: "This is what we wanted to be known—this is the truth." But when one report after the other focused the glare of its searchlight on the final horrors and the most outrageous atrocities, I began to feel—here I can only speak for myself—that something was missing and that something therefore was wrong. Not that the most terrifying descriptions of inhuman cruelties and inhuman misery were not true! Yet, when the spotlight picked them out, it seemed to me that the background which made them possible, the day-to-day happenings and "normal" aspects of concentration camp life, became almost invisible and certainly unintelligible. And if only the sensational horrors were registered, there was a danger that the far deeper, but less blatant, horror of the whole system would not be fully understood.

I did not believe myself better qualified than others to describe the social reality or the pattern of behaviour in the camps. But I was convinced that such a description should be undertaken, at least at a time when analysis, without the dramatisation which the events themselves supplied more than sufficiently, had become bearable. I thought that it is the final condemnation of a system when it proves to be destructive and evil under the most detached and dispassionate examination, taking all the mixed human and social motives into account and transmitting the halftones as well as the black or white of the extremes. Above all, if the civilised world, as we would still like to call it, can hope to rid itself of the evils which came to the surface under Nazi rule and, in their most terrible form, in the concentration camps, we who can bear evidence must provide all possible factual material for research—and heart-searching. This is what I have tried to do in this report of my experiences.

It is only my individual experience, my own side of the truth, which I can tell and have attempted to tell. I know only too well that others who were in the same camp at the same time might have seen and felt vastly different things and could, with equal

justification, tell what was true for them, and indeed another perfectly valid part of the truth, creating a picture which would complement mine while appearing to contradict it. I was one of the privileged prisoners of the women's concentration camp at Birkenau-Auschwitz. My personal position was peculiar, because I was an "Aryan", a "German", and a doctor who could work professionally all the time. This made my survival possible. It gave me an opportunity to see various facets of camp life, which others may not have known at all; it also saved me from the deepest sufferings and made it comparatively easy for me to achieve an analytical frame of mind, such as would have been impossible for those whose experiences were more horrible than mine. Last but not least, it created specific problems for me and thus forced me to think out the moral implications of my situation with particular care.

I am a Viennese, but at the time of my detention I was married to a Reich German. Therefore I was a member of the German group of prisoners for more reasons than that of the "Anschluss". I accepted this position and the difficulties it implied for me, the Austrian. As all the German prisoners of the Nazis shared in the same privileges and responsibilities, which I could not reject at that time, I do not wish to repudiate them now. All the more reason, in my view, to investigate the complicated ideological and social forces which shaped German Fascism and which possessed the men and women who made the system of the concentration camps workable.

If I describe the cases of individuals I met during those years, it is because I want to give concrete illustrations of my general observations. It is infinitely difficult to transmit the sensations I felt or the atmosphere in which I lived, and I am acutely conscious of my inability to give more than a sketchy picture. But I am not a poet. I am not capable of conjuring up the whole of that life—perhaps because I am afraid of re-living it fully. All I can do is to state facts, thoughts and feelings of mine as honestly as I can. It is my hope that, in having done so, I may snatch out of the indelible, corrosive past something of positive value to others.

ELLA LINGENS-REINER.

London, December 1947.

INTRODUCTION

By ARTURO BAREA

FIFTY YEARS ago, in 1897, H. G. Wells published the uncanny story called "The War of the Worlds", in which he described the invasion of Victorian England by the Martians, the destruction and disintegration of the civilised life of the London he knew, and the almost magical disappearance of the menace. In one place, where he made his hero speak of his grim fight for survival, are the words:

"It is disagreeable for me to recall and write these things, but I set them down that my story may lack nothing. Those who have escaped the dark and terrible aspects of life will find my brutality, my flash of rage in our final tragedy, easy enough to blame, for they know what is wrong as well as any, but not what is possible to tortured men. But those who have been under the shadow, who have gone down at last to elemental things, will have a wider charity."

Our generations have no need to imagine a sinister cosmic invasion in order to visualise the dark and terrible aspects of life. Not so long ago, people, millions of people all over the world, were *under the shadow*, had *gone down to elemental things*, and we were all threatened by it. One immediate danger, the menace incarnate in Nazism, is past. But the "shadow" is still looming. If we want to ban it, we must have the energy to recognise and understand it. It is much too facile to say "the Germans . . ." or "the Nazis". As long as we try to delude ourselves into believing that things which happened in the German concentration camps could not happen again elsewhere, we live with less disturbed minds, but we also indulge in an intellectual disarmament. The ugly forces which went into the making of the system and method of National Socialism cannot be classified and dismissed with national or geographical labels. The S.S. men who were capable of gassing thousands and thousands of helpless people were themselves human beings; we may say they were "monsters", but whatever we call them, they were humans, not Martians. And the prisoners who under the whiplash of fear fought for their

survival until their moral values were strained to breaking point—or sometimes beyond it—were only too human. It is easy enough to pick out the unmitigated villains and pathological sadists, the utter egoists and callous go-getters, but this does not help our understanding much farther. What about the countless others, gaolers or prisoners, who were part and parcel of concentration camps for so many years? What happened inside their minds? What were the motives, what the explanations of their conduct? How could those act, these survive as they did?

We, who have not succumbed to the shadow and have the will to fight against any repetition of the horror, must also have the courage to explore the worst, so as to discover its roots and extirpate them.

In this task, Dr. Lingens-Reiner's book can be of great importance, because it gives us an account which I, for one, have not found elsewhere: an account of the life of prisoners and S.S. in a women's concentration camp, as it was in its grey everyday aspects. She, herself a prisoner of the "extermination" camp of Auschwitz, has found the strength to put on record, not the highlights of heroism and the unrelieved black of ultimate brutality, but her own harassing moral conflicts as a doctor and fellow-prisoner, the contradictory behaviour of her companions such as she saw it, and the mental make-up of the S.S. such as she observed it. Out of her descriptions—and only she could tell how hard it was to achieve the balance which inspired their writing!—emerges a picture more terrible and frightening than the photographs of Belsen. After all, one can differentiate oneself from "devils in human shape" almost as completely as H. G. Wells' hero could feel himself apart from the invading Martians. But the dividing line is not so comfortingly sharp in the majority of cases. The S.S. men whom the prisoners of Auschwitz saw every day were little men with more or less bad or good qualities, ordinary people who had become part of an infernal system and were its prisoners as well as its executioners. Reading this book, we begin to see the way in which the whole machine worked, converting every good into evil, exploiting bad impulses and good impulses with equal skill. We are made to realise what happens when the "thin coating of civilisation" is smashed.

But how does it come to be smashed? The question is of the most urgent significance for us, not just from a historical point of view, but for the immediate future of mankind.

Some of the answers are, if not given, at least stimulated by this book. We learn to trace the effects of constant fear for one's life: the disintegration of moral standards, mutual consideration, self-respect. And we find again, under the extreme pressure of

fear of death, kindness, courage, compassion, and hatred of violence surviving miraculously, as the eternal foundations of human values able to save not the individual, but a community of individuals.

I believe that this book is a looking-glass in which the reader honest enough to recognise it will see a human face which he would never have imagined as his own. It is difficult to admit that the urge to live should lead into such depths of suffering, degradation and moral ugliness, and yet everyone is compelled to ask himself: what would *you* do in such a situation? This is a sobering, cleansing, and humbling question, for no one can be quite sure of his or her answer. Conscious of this, we comprehend the reasons for petty quarrels between fellows-in-misery, the justification of an apparently inhuman eagerness to inherit the soiled palliasse of a comrade killed by typhus—and the power of fellowship wherever it rises above the impulse to self-preservation. But we also realise how the little S.S. men were driven by dull resentment or fear for themselves, how men and women can be decent at one time and bestial at another, and how selfish cowardice can create worse injustice, can lead to greater brutality than deliberate cruelty alone could do.

This, to my mind, is the greatest value of PRISONERS OF FEAR. It clearly shows us a danger we can combat because it partly lies in ourselves and because we can tackle its social and psychological causes, a danger which we once overcame in defeating the National Socialist powers, but which continues to exist: that selfish cowardice which makes us shut our eyes to coming conflicts and refrain from action, until our fear turns us into mental and moral prisoners and exposes us to the risk of becoming, physically, prisoners behind electrified wire—or to the equally terrible risk of sending other human beings as prisoners into concentration camps.

In other words, this account of past suffering and evil becomes a call to action, to a clarification and renewal of our social thinking and moral standards, applied not only to German National Socialism but to the whole human society of our times.

CHAPTER ONE

PERSONAL PRELUDE

TOWARDS THE end of 1944, when the more intelligent among the German S.S.—those who did not altogether shut their eyes against facts—were beginning to realise that their case was lost, I had a conversation with one of them, an ardent fanatic. He said to me, word for word: "It is quite possible that we shall lose this war and that all the wonderful things Adolf Hitler has created will be destroyed by the Unholy Alliance of our enemies. But there is one achievement that will stand, and future generations will thank us for it—there is one fact which will never be reversed: except in the small neutral countries, there are no Jews left on the European Continent. That the Jews will come back in appreciable numbers from the Anglo-Saxon countries where they prosper is most unlikely. Anyhow, the Western Jews do not multiply. Thus, the fact that we have exterminated, root and branch, the mass reservoir in the East from which they were drawing fresh forces makes one thing certain: we have freed Europe from the Jews for good." The man spoke quietly, in deadly earnest, from the depth of his conviction. What could I reply? There was no answer, for we did not speak the same language. He seemed to me completely mad—just as mad as I must have seemed to him because I failed to share his views.

I had a similar conversation in the concentration camp with Dr. Fritz Klein, the S.S. doctor of the Belsen trial. Originally he had shown some consideration to his non-Jewish patients, which made his unspeakable cruelties towards Jewish prisoners stand out all the more glaringly. I told him that I felt ashamed of being counted among the Germans. He asked naïvely: "Why?" I pointed to the chimney of the crematorium and answered: "How can you ask—you, a doctor? At this moment I don't want to discuss the Jewish question—neither the circumstances which might make it difficult for Germans and Jews to live together, nor the possibility or impossibility, desirability or undesirability, of Jewish assimilation. It is not a question of whether the Jews are nice and valuable people, or the opposite. The only question here is: have you, as a doctor, no respect for human life?" Dr. Klein was in no way embarrassed. He only said: "Out of respect for human life, I would remove a purulent appendix from a

diseased body. The Jews are the purulent appendix in the body of Europe."

Anti-Semitism was not only one of the fundamental tenets of the Nazi creed, it was probably the only point of the doctrine, apart from the sacred person of the Fuehrer, which even the more rationally minded Nazis would refuse to discuss. Either you were of the faith or you were not. Anti-Semitism is not an indispensable ingredient of Fascism as a social system; the attitude of Mussolini has proved the contrary; its importance as a safety-valve and as a means of enriching discontented followers should not, however, be under-rated. It was precisely because there was no rational link between Anti-Semitism and the social system of Nazi-Fascism that the irrational, emotional connection was so strong and any discussion of this point so hopeless.

This specific atmosphere of German Fascism—of Nazism—turned "Judenbeguenstigung"—the "Aiding and Abetting of Jews", as the technical term ran—into the most despicable crime anyone could commit. Because I committed it, I was sent to the concentration camp.

Actually I had done very little. In fact, too little. There were some friends of ours, Jews, who lived in Poland. An "Aryan" Pole brought us news from them. He told us that the Germans had killed six or seven million people in Poland—Poles and Jews. Could we help our friends and, if possible, other Jews to escape abroad? Someone who had succeeded in getting away had left us the address of a man who had helped him. We thought we could help others through him. Our friends came to us with the papers of Polish agricultural labourers; we had them for a few days in our house in Vienna, before they could be taken to the Swiss frontier. The man who was supposed to help them was himself a Jew. But he was a spy, a Jewish Gestapo spy: he had allowed one person to escape so that he might catch others with greater certainty. He led our friends straight into the hands of the Gestapo. That was the story, as far as the Gestapo found out. But, in addition, they discovered that we had let a Jewish girl live with us for three months, without registering her with the authorities. Also, a letter happened to arrive from some Jewish friends of ours who lived in the United States and wrote to us via Switzerland, in an attempt to get news about their old people whom they had left behind. This was enough to convince the Gestapo that we had built up a vast organisation which they believed to be in close contact with the Polish resistance movement, as the people concerned were Polish Jews. The most aggravating single circumstance was the fact that I had been a member

of the local branch executive of the Austrian Social Democratic Party.

My case appeared to be so important that the Head of the Political Search Bureau (Politisches Fahndungsamt), a certain Dolfi, decided to handle it himself. At the interrogation I managed at first to clear myself reasonably well. I found that the dreaded omniscience of the Gestapo was nothing but a myth. In reality they were fumbling in the dark. Any word which admitted the slightest detail was one word too many. This in itself was part of the danger. It was bad enough if the Gestapo discovered something. But if they failed to do so, they took you to be diabolically clever and subtle, as you had apparently succeeded in covering your tracks. And that was worse. For then they regarded you as the "intellectual enemy" whose mere existence was a menace to the Reich. You had to grant them a certain power of intuition: they were able, if not to convict their enemies by proof, at least to smell them out.

Sometimes they liked to have political discussions with their prisoners. My conversation with Dolfi will always remain fresh in my memory; I will give a short account of it to show the mental level of a man who after all had a certain standing within the Nazi hierarchy. He asked me: "Why did you want to get those Jews to Switzerland? All we wanted to do was to take them to Poland and settle them there in a closed Jewish area. Thousands of Germans have been conscripted and directed to work away from their homes, in the course of this war, but apparently you had no wish to interfere then!" When I told him I had acted as I did because the Jews were being sent to Poland to be killed, and that I could not stand by passively, watching it happen, he retorted: "You are completely crazy! The people there are working in factories."

Those were Dolfi's own words. Later I was to find that the pattern always repeated itself: those people did things which they would at first deny with every sign of abhorrence, and which, once they could no longer uphold their denial, they would defend with every sign of sincere conviction as being right and just.

And yet it was just thinkable that the police officer really had no clear picture of the things happening out there in Poland: it was the great art of these people to organise their doings so that the right hand was able to ignore what the left hand was doing. After all, factories did exist in which some Jews had to work for a time before they died. . . .

My conversation with Dolfi turned to other anti-Semitic measures of the Government. I voiced my opinion that a nation which prohibited the use of seats in public parks to a certain

group of the population made itself ridiculous. Thereupon he told me a rambling story about an old lady who went for a walk along the "Promenade" of the Semmering, one of the Austrian health resorts in the mountains; when she was tired she was unable to find a seat on one of the benches because all were occupied by Jews. "And what do you say now?" he concluded his lucid argument. Weary of the discussion, I shrugged my shoulders and said: "I suppose the Corporation should have provided more seats." This brainwave of mine struck him dumb. But as a matter of fact we had, symbolically, touched on the crux of the matter. In the years before Hitler there had not been enough "seats" in Germany and Austria. Not enough seats, but by no means lack of space in which to erect seats. The situation had become critical; but under Hitler the people of Germany and Austria took the worst possible way out: they made room for some of those who had been standing (many, it is true, for a very long time) by chasing away some of those who had been sitting—that is, the Jews and the anti-Fascists. For those who remained they supplied powder-barrels, on which they sat down quite happily—at first.

My interrogation was not particularly interesting in itself. Much to my surprise, it was conducted in a fairly civilised manner. Apparently by that time—the autumn of 1942—the period of arbitrary, purposeless tortures for the sake of sadistic pleasure was past. They seemed no longer to get a thrill out of beating up prisoners—it is characteristic of such "amusements" that they pall quickly. I found my impression confirmed when I asked my fellow-prisoners about their experiences. Those whose cases had been clear-cut were not ill-treated. My own case had been of that kind. At first I had lied successfully; the Gestapo had believed me; and so there had been no reason for violence. Later they had found out the truth, without me; no uncertain points had remained; and again there had not been any need for violence, from their point of view. Women who refused to answer questions were put into solitary confinement, without work or exercise; whether they were tortured at a later stage was something their fellow-prisoners had no means of finding out. I was told of one woman who had been exposed to the glare of powerful searchlights and almost blinded, but I never saw her myself. Later, in the concentration camp, I usually tried to discover whether new-comers had been tortured or ill-used during their interrogation. German prisoners frequently answered in the negative. Nearly all the foreign prisoners answered in the affirmative. I myself saw Polish women lying on the floor of the reception hut at Auschwitz unable to move: their buttocks, swollen and purplish-blue, showed

bleeding gashes, three to five inches long, up to one and a half inches wide, up to an inch deep. Those women had been traveling for three days, and their wounds were not even dressed. The police had tried to make them give away the hide-out of a group of Polish partisans. I pointed them out to Dr. Rohde, at that time the camp doctor—a good-natured man who liked to show some consideration to prisoners of every nationality, particularly to women. I said to him: "Look at these women; that's how they arrive here after their interrogation." He appeared very unhappy. I could see that he was embarrassed by what he saw, that he disapproved of it, and that he reflected on the unpleasantness it would mean for him if he were to report the case.

Though it could be argued that a report from the S.S. doctor would in all probability have helped neither those poor women nor future victims, it is by no means a foregone conclusion. A friend of mine whom I met in Dachau Concentration Camp told me that in the Dutch camp at Fught the camp doctor reported on principle every case of this kind which came to his notice, and so succeeded in getting a Gestapo chief—one of the worse offenders—removed from his post. Even under the conditions of concentration camps personal courage sometimes achieved results; but it was not surprising that it was a rare thing, under the given conditions. In the case of the Polish women, Dr. Rohde shrugged and mumbled something about the injuries being merely superficial. The women were left without medical attention until the following morning. Yet that same camp doctor had once roused our Chief Doctor and the dispenser in the middle of the night to get salicylate for an old woman who complained of rheumatic pains. . . . But those were contradictions which I came to know at a later stage, not during my novitiate in the police prison of Vienna.

The time I spent in prison was on the whole uneventful, interesting mainly by reason of the observations I was able to make. I lived for four months in a cell about nine feet square; it was intended as a single cell, but I shared it with three or four other women. During all that time I had no exercise whatsoever, no work, no book, no newspaper. According to regulations, we should have been taken to the prison yard for exercise under supervision. But since there was a shortage of staff no one was available for supervision, so we stayed in our cells. As a political prisoner I was entitled to buy a daily newspaper; but since the authorities always put a common criminal into our cell—probably on purpose, so as to cancel out the privileges of the political prisoners—I was never able to get a newspaper. The officer in charge of my case had given me permission to read and write.

But to exercise these rights I should have had to be put either in a single cell or in a cell the other inmates of which enjoyed the same privileges. There were no such cells left in the overcrowded prison. Therefore I could neither read nor write. In this way the conditions of my imprisonment were infinitely harsher than the regulations laid down, and yet none of those regulations had been altered, nobody was specifically responsible for the increased severity. The responsibility fell on the system, which turned into law-breakers so many people who in normal times would never have seen the inside of a prison that harsh conditions were indeed the "unavoidable" outcome.

That we got every night a different soiled palliasse, that women had to tear their underwear into strips because they could not get sanitary towels, that as many as ten women had to share a cell intended for one person—all these and many other hardships were only different aspects of the same thing. Everywhere one came up against the mechanism of divided, and therefore elusive responsibility. This system which made it impossible to ascertain the final responsibility for any act, the most insignificant as well as the most horrible, contains the key to a psychological understanding of most of the happenings in the police prisons and in the concentration camps. The system was designed to make it possible for many members of the S.S. to take part in actions of which—be it from cowardice or from a vestige of moral values—they would otherwise not have been capable.

The enforced idleness during the four months of my imprisonment in the Central Police Prison of Vienna gave me ample opportunity to study the personal history, general attitude and alleged offences of my fellow-prisoners. Altogether I became familiar with about thirty of them. Ten were ordinary criminals, arrested for larceny or fraud, who would have found themselves in gaol under any government. Yet among them, too, there were some typical products of the times. I recall a young working-class woman whose life had been one long struggle. Then she had been called up to work; had received good wages and at the same time drawn her allowance as the wife of a soldier on active service. For the first time in her life she had enough money to buy the nice things she had always wanted. And now she could not buy them because they did not exist. She was not prepared to accept this mockery of fate. She had been able to understand a state of affairs in which you can't have things when you have no money; but to go without things when she had money to buy them seemed too much to her. She was employed at the Post Office. When she found out that the parcels she handled contained silk underwear, blouses, handbags and gloves which were being sent

abroad for export, to bring in foreign currency, she saw red. Together with a few colleagues, she took as many of the dainty things as she could manage. In normal times, and with her husband at home, this young woman might never have turned into a thief.

The other twenty of my fellow-prisoners had offended against one or other of the innumerable new regulations which had come into being under the Nazi regime, most of them in connection with the war. What struck me most forcibly was their complete lack of understanding of, and feeling for, the punishable nature of the actions they had committed. Naturally this does not apply to the political prisoners, but there were fewer of them among the female prisoners than among the male. The majority of the women were completely bewildered; they had no idea what wrong they had done or what they should have done instead. I had the impression that the sequence of events and the war had reduced them to a state of utter helplessness, made more acute by the absence of their menfolk, on whose advice and explanations they had been wont to rely. Many years earlier I had worked in a Legal Advice Centre run by the Social Democratic Party in Vienna. There it had been my experience that the Viennese working-class women had a well-developed sense of the right and the just. As a rule they did not come into conflict with the law, except in cases where the law itself was out of step with contemporary morality. (I am thinking, for instance, of the contradictory, humanly and rationally unintelligible divorce laws of Austria.) In prison I found that my old experience still held good. But, in addition, the laws of the Third Reich had become far too involved and numerous for the understanding of the average woman, even when they were justified.

There was, for instance, a charwoman who had stolen ration cards which were being sent away for pulping. "I didn't take any money, and anyway, *they* had thrown away the cards I took. It would have been such a pity, when one gets so little in any case!" she would say over and over again, in genuine bewilderment. The working of a rationing system seemed beyond her comprehension. Any pre-Nazi Austrian Court would have treated her as a first offender, sentenced her conditionally to a few weeks' imprisonment, and bound her over. In 1942 she was sentenced to nine months' hard labour.

There was another prisoner—a quiet, delicate woman whose touching simplicity and innate nobility of mind I shall never forget. She had followed her Jewish lover to France and married him there. When the war broke out her husband went immediately to the front, leaving her alone and miserable in a strange

city whose language she hardly understood. Later, when the German troops marched into Paris, she was possessed by a single thought—to go home. She heard a rumour that according to German laws her marriage was not valid. She took her papers to an office of the German Military Command and asked to be sent home. At first she was fortunate, in that the officer interviewing her was not a Nazi. He at once grasped the situation and whispered into her ear: "You're lucky nobody knows about you and your marriage. Don't be a fool, woman; get out of here, quick!" But she failed to understand. "My marriage is invalid, isn't it?" she tried to explain, and repeated her request to be sent home. She simply did not know about the Nuremberg Laws; even less about their validity abroad under the German rule. After the "Anschluss" she had not stayed more than a few weeks in Austria, so that the racial laws had not been brought home to her, and before the annexation of Austria they had meant nothing to her. When she persisted in her request, another officer took her into custody. For weeks she was dragged from prison to prison, until she was brought to Vienna. At her trial her counsel maintained successfully that there was no evidence of her husband being a Jew. She was sentenced to ten months' imprisonment for contravention of marriage regulations, committed by concluding a marriage abroad without the consent of the Registrar of her home town; the months of imprisonment pending the trial were taken into account, and she was set free on the spot. (This seems to have been one of the cases of conscious sabotage of Nazi legislation by an Austrian Court, which later induced Hitler to issue his furious Judicial Ordinance complaining about the practice of the judiciary.) The woman believed that the matter was settled, and worked quietly as a clerk in an office, until one day she was arrested by the Gestapo.

She told me in detail what had been said at her interrogation. "You went to France and married a Jew?"—"Yes, I did. But please, sir, that matter is settled. I've been in prison ten months for it." "Then we'll lock you up for a little longer, just to show you that the matter is not settled." That was all. Apart from these three sentences, nothing was said. When I was sent to the cell the woman had been there for two months, worrying herself to death in an effort to discover exactly why she had been arrested again. When I had pieced her case together, from such information as she was able to give, I explained to her that she had been re-arrested because the Gestapo had not been satisfied with the mild construction the Court had applied to her offence, instead of convicting her under the Nuremberg Racial Laws. I added, trying to cheer her up, that she should not take her pre-

dicament too much to heart; it would pass—at least she had the knowledge of having been happy for a while. The woman looked at me, her eyes big in her pale face, and said quietly: “No, I was not happy. I loved my husband; but all the time I was afraid that he was only staying with me because he earned nothing and I kept him going with my work. When he left to go to the front, just after we were married, he wrote me a last letter, and it confirmed my fears. ‘I’ve never loved you,’ he wrote. And it’s for his sake that I am here now. . . .” Then she added, her eyes suddenly ablaze with sheer, determined hatred: “But I did not mention this at the interrogation, and I would never tell it to *them*.” Three weeks later she was sent to the women’s concentration camp at Ravensbrück.

Sometimes the utter ignorance of the existing regulations which prevailed alike among prisoners and prison staff gave rise to absurd situations. Once a wardress asked a prisoner what she had done to be “inside”. The woman replied that she had attempted to sell some foreign gold coins. “But how ever did you hit upon such a silly idea?” exclaimed the wardress. “Nowadays, with money losing its value as it does, you should have kept them, of course!” “But if I had done that they would have punished me just the same,” the prisoner answered. And the wardress walked away, shaking her head in perplexity. She would have been even more surprised if she had been arrested on the spot for her well-meant advice—something which might very easily have happened. An old woman who died in Auschwitz Camp from diabetes had been sent there because she had, by a similar remark, “shaken the confidence in the stability of German currency”.

It was later, at Auschwitz, that I came across the worst case of a woman who had not the faintest idea why she had been sent first to prison and then to a concentration camp. I met her in one of the hospital huts. She was a living skeleton, suffering from advanced phthisis. Clumsily she told me her story. (Here I must add a rider: one had to be rather cautious before accepting such tales. All the prisoners who had told the Gestapo lies, or had simulated simple-mindedness, would keep this up with their fellow-prisoners, if only because they feared that there might be spies among them. Also there were professional criminals who lied on principle. Therefore it was not advisable to take every man or woman at face value who professed ignorance and innocence; but after a while, with a little practice, it was not impossible to distinguish between real and sham simplicity.)

The woman whose story I want to quote was a genuinely simple soul. Her main misfortune was that she was practically illiterate.

She came from the Hungarian frontier—one of the parts of Austria where the level of general education is lowest among the older generations—and was married to a carter, who had been out of work for many years in the time before the annexation of Austria. She had been anxious to earn some money, and had registered with the Labour Exchange (pre-Nazi), but was never offered a job. In the summer of 1939, when her husband was working and she was no longer looking for a job, she suddenly received a summons to report for work at an ordnance factory. She thought this was a belated reply to her earlier applications, in which she was now no longer interested. With difficulty she managed to decipher the main part of the communication, but did not get to the sinister official formula "failing which". Even had she done so she would probably not have grasped its implications. After this she received a few more official communications to the same effect, was vaguely surprised at the unexpected friendly interest the gentlemen of the Labour Exchange had developed in her, and threw them away as she had done the first paper. Then she was suddenly arrested for "refusal to work and sabotage of the war effort". She was completely dumbfounded. She could not understand why she had not been given work when she needed it badly, and was to be forced to work when she no longer wanted it. In vain she tried to make the police officer understand that she could hardly read and that the whole matter was beyond her. "I know it means doing you a wrong," the officer had told her, "but I can do nothing about it. I've got my instructions from Berlin, and they say you're to be sent to a camp in order to be taught to work." The woman spent four years in concentration camps, first at Ravensbrück, later at Auschwitz. Like many of her kind, she had been forgotten by the authorities. Soon after her arrival in Auschwitz Camp she contracted tuberculosis; she died in March 1943, in a state of complete physical exhaustion—she had first survived typhoid and typhus, "in order that she might be taught to work" for the German war effort. . . .

I myself, despite my legal training, was sometimes surprised to hear that certain things I had done without giving them a further thought were subject to the gravest penalties. For instance, I had once exchanged some cigarettes for poppyseed I wanted to use in the kitchen, and later I was told, by pure chance, that such barter was punishable and the maximum penalty was—at least so I was informed—death.

A closer analysis showed that the Nazis did themselves a great deal of harm by their senseless, indiscriminate mass detentions. Their system could be compared with the procedure of a surgeon

who, unable to isolate a bleeding vessel, grasps all the surrounding tissue to stem the flow. Thus, if the Nazis were unable to find an offender, they would arrest ten or more people, in the hope that the guilty person would be among them, without the least regard for the fate of the others who were obviously innocent. In these mass arrests the people who really had offended against Nazi laws often escaped, because they were prepared and had an explanation ready, or because they extricated themselves systematically in some other way. Of the thirty women with whom I was in prison at one time or another between October, 1942, and February, 1943, only two went from the police prison straight back to liberty. One of them was the most active underground worker of the lot, a woman who had contacts with the H.Q. of the Communist Party. She was released because her friends succeeded in getting one of their members into the entourage of Baldur von Schirach, and so obtained his patronage.

Approximately three-quarters of the German and Austrian prisoners with whom I came into contact had not been opponents of Nazism up to their arrest. Most of them had been apathetic or politically ignorant. Many were made politically conscious through their imprisonment. They were turned into stubborn political fighters, on the one hand through the resentment they felt at their arrest—which so often was without any justification—and at the disproportionate hardship and duration of their prison spell, on the other hand, through deliberate propaganda on the part of fellow-prisoners. Never was there such an ideal field for political agitation as our prison. The political prisoners, mostly Communists, usually spent many months in police cells before being transferred to a concentration camp or to the prison of the Central Criminal Court. Partly to avoid collusion, partly also with the intention of depriving them of their privileges as political prisoners, they were dispersed and put into the cells of the non-political offenders, one or two in each. Other women and girls passed through such a cell, as a result of some ridiculous incident. With most of these the shock of their sudden arrest lasted no more than two days, which they would spend in incessant weeping. Once they got over the shock they would quickly adjust themselves, with all the adaptability of women, to the new surroundings forced upon them. They might have expected death or torture; instead they would find themselves in a small room together with other women. Some of them were free from their daily cares and chores for the first time in many years. This was an important psychological point.

There are few people so continuously bound up in tasks which,

though small, are of immense importance to their families as are housewives, particularly the housewives of the working class, who have to go out to earn money, and to look after a household in their spare time. In war-time housekeeping had become a most exhausting and difficult business, for obvious reasons, and, in addition, most of the women had to work long hours outside their homes. Small wonder, then, that many of them regarded their imprisonment in a police cell as an odd sort of holiday, when they could rest and relax. It was less easy for women who worried about their children at home, but the others would soon feel almost cheerful and at ease; as they had no other way of keeping themselves occupied, they began to think—they wanted to understand how things hung together and to puzzle matters out. Naturally the politically active among the prisoners made good use of the excellent psychological opportunity which thus offered itself. The effectiveness of this form of political education among the population outside the prison walls should not be under-rated. After all, some of the women were eventually released, and they took away a seed which may have borne fruit in a surprising number of cases.

Sometimes the political education in the cell had strange results. The young woman who had pilfered parcels in a post office told me when she first arrived: "I took the things because I wanted them badly." Six weeks later she explained to me that by her thefts she had intended to sabotage the Post Office, the German export trade, and the Third Reich in general. It would, however, be unjust merely to smile at this change in her attitude towards herself. Probably what happened was, that she had been made aware of an element of protest in her actions (an element which she then magnified), directed against Hitler's war machine; she had, indeed, vaguely resented the power which dragged women from their homes into compulsory labour, exploited them for its ends, and rewarded them with money which could not buy anything—now, after her "education", she had to turn her petty pilfering into an act of fight with a moral incentive, into a social action.

The arbitrary mass arrests had yet another result: hardly any of the women felt that their imprisonment was a disgrace. Those who arrived with a feeling of shame lost it very quickly. I remember a business woman who had been allowed to attend an urgent conference, accompanied by a police agent. Feeling acutely embarrassed, she had asked him if she might not introduce him as a relative. "But madam, I assure you there is no reason for you to feel embarrassed at all," the detective had said. "Why, one might say that nowadays every other German is

under arrest." If the police cared so little, it can easily be imagined that the prisoners learned to care even less. This indifference towards imprisonment began to extend to criminal offences as well. The feeling of moral invulnerability which had been a privilege of political prisoners proper spread to the great number of people whose offences were in the border region between the purely political and the purely criminal, with its many imperceptible shades. By this evolution the Nazi authorities lost their strongest weapon in the fight against delinquency. For the fear of social stigma is still the most effective external incentive (as distinct from the internal—that is, the moral—incentive) to lawful behaviour; it outweighs as a deterrent the fear of punishment, just as it outweighs its possible educative effects. As soon as it is no longer considered a disgrace "to have been in prison", short terms of imprisonment become meaningless, particularly in the case of passive, tired women whose reaction to a short loss of liberty—relief from exhausting responsibilities—is not altogether negative. The Nazi authorities must have sensed this change of attitude among the ordinary citizens, for they began to send people to prison for years, preferably for the duration of the war, for the most petty offences.

My own term in a Nazi police prison confirmed a general conviction which could be corroborated by hundreds of cases; never before had there been so much talk about "law and justice being close to the people"; never before had law and justice been so remote, so deeply estranged from the moral instincts of the people; never before so exclusively subservient to the interests of a ruling clique and its war aims.

CHAPTER TWO

JOURNEY TO THE GATES OF AUSCHWITZ

A SOBER ASSESSMENT of my position had made it clear to me after the first few days that I was bound to land up in a concentration camp. The Gestapo could not very well put me on trial without exposing their decoy—the last thing they wanted to do. They had neither the intention nor actually the possibility of releasing me. Therefore the camp was the ideal solution for them. When I said this to the Gestapo official in charge of my case he contradicted me so brazenly that he made me doubt for a moment. He said: "No, we haven't got any camps for women of your sort; it's only the women who won't work that we send there." I am sure that he told me a deliberate lie. In their conversations with my lawyer the various officials took care to treat my case lightly, as though I was shortly to be released. When I was told that I would be sent to a camp, I asked the official for what length of time I should prepare myself; he shrugged his shoulders apologetically and said: "I don't know; that's being decided in Berlin." Yet at the time I knew for a fact that he himself had proposed my "detention in camp for the duration".

It was the shady method that I was to meet again and again in the years that followed. An official only "proposed", he did not decide the term of detention in camp; but in Berlin such "proposals" were confirmed as a matter of principle, because the local Gestapo was given a free hand in dealing with cases. If there was an obvious miscarriage of justice the blame always fell on the local Gestapo—but nobody ever assumed the responsibility.

In the police prison I tried to find out as much as possible about concentration camps. Every Tuesday a transport left for Auschwitz, every Thursday one for Ravensbrück. Prisoners from all the provinces were assembled in Vienna and sent on from there in collective transports. My transport consisted of eighty men and forty women; most of the others were presumably about as large. We had an indication in the shortage of palliasses, which occurred in the prison every time a transport passed through. It is not difficult to work out from those figures how many people were eventually sent to the camps from Vienna alone.

Once I asked a little Gestapo official—who had the appearance

of a member of the Salvation Army—whether any of the women sent to concentration camps ever returned alive. He gave me an indignant glance and said in a tone of honest conviction: "Not one of them has died on us!" Later, when I saw countless people dying in the camp, I sometimes thought of this little man; and I did not know whether to laugh or to cry.

It seemed impossible to get a clear idea of life in the camps. Before my arrest I had heard a lot about the concentration camps for men and the horrible conditions there, but I knew nothing about camps for women. I was not even familiar with the name of Ravensbrück. One fellow-prisoner told me she had heard that life there was terrible—the women had to go about in clogs, without stockings or shoes, all through the winter. Another, however, told of a woman she knew who had apparently come back from Ravensbrück looking healthy and plump. A young working-class girl had heard talk of Auschwitz, and said: "Oh, yes, that's the place where they kill the Jews in a swimming-pool; my fiancé told me about it." A friendly wardress told me that Auschwitz Camp was situated somewhere near the Slovakian border, and that it was about to be converted into a joint-stock company. The "Salvation Army" man who had felt such optimism regarding the length of life in a concentration camp assured me that Auschwitz was a "rather mild" camp. On the other hand, a police inspector, who looked on with compassion while we were loaded into prison vans, said to me: "So now it's your turn, and unfortunately you're in for Auschwitz, not for Ravensbrück!"

Later I saw that all those people had told the truth, and that all the contradictory facts taken together made up the reality of the camp, which to this very day seems unreal to me.

At first I was somewhat frightened at the prospect of having to face, alone and unprotected, a situation in which my life would be in danger, but I also felt curiosity and an urge to find out about things. Besides, the long confinement in the narrow prison cell had begun to tell on me. Therefore, strange as this may sound, I was almost pleased when our departure was finally announced in the middle of February. In my abysmal ignorance, and because I had heard tales of meticulous inspection in matters of order and cleanliness, I made a careful scrutiny of all the things I meant to take with me to the camp, cleaning and refurbishing them as best I could. The comb, which I should have been allowed to keep, was left behind at the last moment; everything else was taken from me in the end; and in the face of the unimaginable filth prevalent in Auschwitz Camp my preparations seemed decidedly childish in retrospect. But my mental preparation for the things in store for me was just as inadequate. In excuse I can only say that it would have

been impossible to form a mental picture even remotely resembling the reality.

At last we were about to start. We all had some food with us: only the Jewish women had nothing whatsoever. One of the wardresses—her name was Frau Hahn—bought, with her own money, unrationed snacks and gave them to these women so that they should have some food during their journey. Another wardress had shortly before been arrested because she had smuggled letters for the prisoners, not for money, but out of the goodness of her heart. I was afraid that Frau Hahn would soon share the same fate.

It seems right to me not to pass over those little acts of kindness in silence. They add up to a total which deserves to be put into the other side of the scales—I was to find such people even among the camp guards.

At three o'clock in the morning we were lined up in the prison yard. The day before we had been allowed a bath and had been disinfected—a somewhat superfluous measure of precaution, for it would be difficult to find a new disease which we could have carried into the camp. Then we were driven to the station through the dark streets of Vienna: nobody was to see how many people were being dragged away. We travelled in ordinary passenger coaches, and after staring at the grey walls of a prison cell for months on end it was a great joy to see houses, woods, fields, villages and people doing normal, civilian work. We stayed the first night in the prison at Brno. It was a typical old-Austrian official building, with worn-out stairs and cramped, low rooms, not very clean, but not too dirty either—almost cosy in the manner of an old country inn, if one wanted to look at it that way. There were iron bedsteads, a small stove was lit, and at first our mood was quite cheerful.

Evening came, and there was a hush in one of the corners of the room: the Polish women had gathered round the table and were praying. There they knelt, quiet and resigned; one of them intoned the prayer, the others spoke the responses.

Suddenly I heard somebody say: "The girl over there's been in Auschwitz before." The girl was an Austrian who had escaped from the camp in October and been in hiding for four months. She had been caught, and now joined our transport at Brno, to go back to camp. She was a primitive woman, frightened to death of what would happen to her after her return. I tried to drag some information out of her, but she spoke reluctantly and haltingly.

"Where does one live there?"

"In a sort of barn; it's very draughty."

"What does one wear?"

"The dresses of the Jews."

"But what do the Jews wear, then?"

"The clothes of the other Jews."

"But why don't they simply keep their own things?"

"I don't know."

I shook my head and tried another approach.

"What sort of work do they give you?"

"The Germans don't work at all, they only watch the Jews working."

"And what's the work of the Jews?"

"That's not much either. Most of the time you only stand about in the open and they count how many you are; it takes three or four hours in the morning, and in the evening, too. But it never comes out right."

"Is it the same in winter?"

"It doesn't matter what the weather is. If you're sick, you go to the hospital; but there you only get worse; and if you go to Hut 25 you're finished; then you go straight up the chimney."

She continued like this: it all sounded muddled and incomprehensible to me, and I just refused to believe her. I thought she was exaggerating because she herself was afraid of the consequences of her flight and wanted to frighten us, too. So I said to her:

"Look here, if what you say were true three-quarters of the women there would die in the first three months. That's clearly impossible."

She shrugged her shoulders.

The right answer would have been that this was indeed the case—that 75 per cent. of the women prisoners were no longer alive after three or four months in Auschwitz Camp. The girl either did not know or did not want to say it. In my arrogance I thought her a pathological liar, while in fact she had not told me half of what she might have told.

But I slept soundly and dreamlessly, in light-hearted self-assurance, till the next morning.

The second stage of the journey was somewhat less comfortable. We were stowed into prison-carriages, four of us into each cell designed for two, ten into each cell designed for four prisoners. If there had been more of us we should all have been packed into those cells. There was no limit.

After a night in Mährisch-Schönberg we went on to Breslau. I had high hopes of Breslau Gaol, because I imagined that there we should find a little more comfort and a chance to wash. In the late evening we stood under the archway of the police prison. Because of the black-out the entrance to the inner yard was screened

by a tarpaulin. It dropped abruptly. In the glare of searchlights the huge modern building with its barred windows stood out sharply from a night-black sky, like a fascinating piece of stage setting. It was impressive, it seemed a symbol of the harsh, powerful "German Justice". The reception bureau was clean, almost smart in the fashion of any well-kept office. Then we were put into the dirtiest, smallest, most miserable police lock-up I have ever seen.

There some women prisoners from the Reich joined us, most of them on the way to the camp from one penitentiary or another. Again a young girl was the expert in concentration camps. She had been a year in the women's camp at Ravensbrück, had been released, and was now being sent to the camp again. What she told us tallied with my preconceived ideas of a concentration camp: iron military discipline, scrupulous cleanliness, heavy penalties for every crease in a blanket, every hole in a stocking, and so on. On the one hand it sounded reassuring, because it implied less danger to life and health; but on the other hand I felt personal qualms, because I knew myself to be utterly unsuited for a barrack-square discipline and particularly resentful of the senseless mania for order-for-order's sake. I visualised myself spending most of my time in the correction cell. I was completely at a loss, and unable to reconcile this latest report with the earlier one. One of the two girls, I felt, was a liar.

Yet both had told the truth. Ravensbrück was the main political camp, dating from the time when Nazism was at the height of its power; there they undertook to break the will-power of their ideological adversaries among the women, with an incredible hardness, but with a certain regard for formal correctness. Auschwitz, however, was the extermination camp, a symptom of Nazism's boundless and shameless greed, but also of its beginning decline; it was a half-completed camp into which new masses of human beings were packed incessantly, so that any attempt at bringing order out of the chaos seemed practically hopeless.

One small illustration of the difference between these two camps. I once saw a postcard written by a young girl who had been sent to Ravensbrück in the autumn of 1942; the concentration camp at Ravensbrück was set up in 1938 or 1939; the girl had the number 16,000 odd. In February, 1943, I was given the number 36,088; at that time our camp had existed no more than eleven months. Eighteen months later the women prisoners at Auschwitz reached No. 100,000. A new system of numbering was started, with two series, A and B. Series A reached approximately the number 125,000, series B approximately 80,000. In later years, after the summer of 1943, the same overcrowding is said to have

happened in Ravensbrück Camp, with the result that it led to the same conditions as in Auschwitz Camp. And from these figures nearly everything can be inferred: but this I learned later.

After a day in Breslau Gaol our transport was sent on to Auschwitz via Kattovice. On this last stage of our journey our guards were old members of the Breslau police force, retired policemen who had been in the Service under the Social Democrat Severing, and who now were occasionally hauled out of their retirement for special duties because the Nazi authorities were short of staff. This time they had not been told in advance the special duty for which they had been called in. When they found out they were upset—a fact which showed that, at any rate in Breslau, people had some idea of Auschwitz Camp. The men told us that they would have brought us food from home had they known that we were bound for Auschwitz. As it was, they gave us whatever food they happened to be carrying with them, and looked at us as if we were sentenced to death—as, indeed, we were.

The officer in charge was a typical Nazi police officer, young, trim, well-fed. He asked me why I was sent to the camp. When I told him, he shouted at me: "Women like you really deserve to be beaten to death with a rope—whose fault is this war, if not the fault of those damned Jews?" As soon as he had gone one of the policemen threw a food-packet over to me. I looked at him and asked: "In spite of it?" He answered: "Because of it!" Towards the end of the journey another policeman said to one of my fellow-prisoners: "If any of you women had got away, not one of us would have fired a shot." I do not quite believe this: the commanding officer would have given the order to fire, and all of them would have fired. But perhaps in the best of cases none would have hit the mark. . . .

We arrived at three o'clock in the morning. The railway siding to the camp did not yet exist, and we had to walk for half an hour from the station. We were taken over by an S.S. troop and started at once. It all went off without a single word. We were neither beaten nor kicked. The soldiers looked sullen and bored. After a few minutes of marching an elderly Jew said: "Not so fast, please; I can't manage it." To my surprise, the soldiers slowed down immediately. Soon I realised why they made this show of friendliness. Hardly had we passed the last houses of the town when the various S.S. men accosted those among the prisoners who were reasonably well dressed. One man came up to me and started by telling me that he came from Croatia. When I mentioned that my father was living there, he exclaimed happily: "Then we're fellow-countrymen really!" and asked me to drop behind.

I was curious to find out what was in his mind. He asked: "Have you got a watch?"

I said I had.

"Look here, give it to me," he begged.

"Why on earth should I?" I asked, somewhat suspicious.

At first I thought, quite wrongly, that his suggestion was meant as a trap, and that he intended to denounce me for having tried to bribe him with my watch or something of the kind. There was still a vague notion in my head that anybody who was a sort of official of German jurisdiction had to be more or less correct and incorruptible. Hence I concluded that the man wanted to test me; this would have fitted in with the Gestapo system of *agents-provocateurs*, which I knew only too well. But I was on the wrong track. The S.S. man quite simply wanted my watch.

"Look here, my girl," he said to me. "When you get to the camp they'll strip you naked, throw all your things on a heap, and take them away. So you may just as well let me have your watch; at least I'm your countryman."

I answered that, if he was right, and the watch was lost to me anyway, I did not care whether it was buried in a heap or he got it. But, I told him, I presumed that the watch would be put in store with my other things and handed back to me on my release. He looked at me pityingly:

"Your release?" He shook his head at so much innocence. "Don't imagine that you'll ever get out of the camp alive! We cart three or four lorry-loads of corpses from the women's camp every night and burn them in the wood. No woman can stand the camp for more than a few months. You see, you may just as well give your watch to me."

At this I imagined that he wanted to frighten me into letting him have his heart's desire. I answered, out of the depth of an unshakeable resolution: "But I must stand it, and I shall stand it. I've got my little boy at home, and I must get back to him."

My obtuseness seemed to sadden him, as much for my sake as because it robbed him of the watch, but he was not angry with me. Each day he had to escort prisoners from the station to the camp, and he always tried his luck with some of them, so that he had to reckon on a certain percentage of failures. He even gave me a piece of good-natured advice: "If you really want to try to stick it out, you ought to wangle it so that you get a good Capo." As there was no hope of his getting my watch either way, he thought that I might as well survive; anyhow, he had no personal grudge against me—were we not fellow-countrymen, after all?

His well-meant advice was lost on me, because I had not the slightest idea what a "Capo" was. Later I found that privileged

prisoners (prefects, so to speak) in charge of a working party were called Capos. But to this day I am not sure whether the S.S. man meant that I should try to get into a working party under a decent female Capo, or that I should try to start an affair with a "good" Capo from the adjoining men's camp—that is to say, with a prisoner who, thanks to his position in the camp, would be able to supply me with food and clothing. I feel inclined towards the second interpretation. He proved wrong, as far as my survival was concerned: I stuck it out without the help of a Capo. But events proved him right about my watch. Since I was a German prisoner, it was not "chucked on the heap"; and, since I was a doctor, with the right to possess a watch, it was even given back to me. But when I was half-dazed after my typhus attack a "fellow-countrywoman" of mine, a little prostitute from Vienna, filched it one night. She sold it—so I was told—for two pints of spirits to an S.S. man, who may well have been that first "fellow-countryman", coming into his own in a roundabout way!

We marched past the gates of the men's camp; its brick buildings, lit by dazzling searchlights, had a fairly solid look. But then the road grew much worse. The watch-towers and, behind them, the miserable hutments of the women's camp came into view. It had the poetic name of Birkenau—"Birch-Grove"—near Auschwitz, and at that period 13,000 women were living—no, were vegetating—there.

My new friend seemed to hope that this sight would convert me to his opinion, and made a last attempt: "Won't you give me your watch, after all?" he asked, almost pleading.

But I remained firm and cut short all further onslaughts: "Haven't I told you that I mean to stick it out?"

He answered, genuinely sorry: "But, my dear child, you don't know the Germans—you do not know them."

His words still sounded in my ears when I stood in the camp road and the gates clanked shut behind me. I looked back. Would they ever open again for me?

CHAPTER THREE

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

AT FOUR o'clock we arrived in the reception hut, which to a novice did not look like a usable building. It was a shed, with boards instead of solid walls on both sides, no windows, no flooring. The stamped earth of the floor was so uneven that you could push your whole arm through gaps between the ground and the boards. Equally wide chinks gaped between the walls and the roof, which half-way up was pierced by two rows of skylights. Two-thirds of the front and back walls were taken up by huge barn doors. The inside was bare; there were a few bedsteads, huddled in a corner, and a forlorn little iron stove. In the middle of a winter night the room was damnably cold.

With us was a seventy-year-old woman, a German political prisoner. She was here because she had not been willing to overlook the fact that a Hitler Youth leader, a homosexual, had abused her young grandson. She had addressed complaints to very high quarters, insisting on her right and justice, until she was sentenced for "defamation" to two and a half years penal servitude and subsequent detention in a concentration camp. She had withstood life in the penitentiary, with its severe but fairly clean and ordered conditions, and her spirit was undaunted. In the reception hut she had the sensible idea of collecting some of the wood that was lying about and lighting a fire in the stove. But we others opposed her: after all, it wasn't right to burn wood just like that, without permission! I, too, belonged to the camp of the "moderates" who argued that prisoners should do nothing of the kind. I was still under the impression that it was advisable for people in our situation to behave with exemplary correctness. To the very last I could not get rid of this notion, although it was quite absurd. In reality only those prisoners had a chance to survive in the camp—if they were not privileged on account of their profession, beauty, or other specially favourable circumstances—who were determined to do the exact opposite of what they were told to do, on principle to break every rule governing civilian life.

In that particular instance our discipline was certainly misplaced. In all probability nobody would have bothered about a lit stove or the origin of the firewood, but if for once there had been an inquiry, it would have been perfectly easy to say that

one of the S.S. had given the order to light a fire. Nothing more would have happened than that we should have been told to put it out—and in the meantime we should have been warm.

By this I do not mean to convey that we could have relied on the sympathy of our guards, though some of them had pity for us and would not have interfered as long as they ran no personal risk. We could, however, have reckoned with their complete indifference towards all things, including all human beings.

But at first we knew nothing of this, and so we sat or stood about the shed, shivering with cold. I began to feel a little nervous. I had heard that they liked to torture prisoners right at the beginning, by subjecting them to heat or cold, hunger or thirst, so as to eliminate the weakest among them; our detention in the cold shed seemed ominous to me. But there again I was wrong. The fact that we were left for hours waiting in the cold had nothing to do with a particular evil intent. The draughty shed was an ordinary "block"—that is to say, a hut in no way different from all the other buildings in the camp, in which people had to live for years—and we were kept waiting because nobody had time to bother about us.

In those hours I discovered something in me of which I had never previously been aware. I had always tried, in prison and in normal life outside, to be helpful and a good comrade. Now I realised that there was a limit to those fellow feelings; some reached it sooner and others later, when it was a matter of their life or health, but everyone reached it at some point. In Breslau I had lent my fur coat to a young woman who was strong and healthy but had only a thin summer suit. While we were on the move I did not feel the cold, even without a greatcoat. Here in the shed I stood it for an hour, but then I asked her to let me have my fur coat back, although I was wearing a thick winter costume. It was simply like this: will you be cold, or shall I be cold? will you risk falling ill on entering the camp, or shall I? will you survive, or shall I? As soon as one sensed that this was at stake everyone turned egotist. But, then, one was also quite alone, with nobody to help; in camp hardly a day passed when one's survival was not at stake. This principle, this enforced necessity of glaring egotism, dominated all the inmates of the concentration camp, the best and the worst. If one felt like despairing at the effect of the principle as applied by others, one had to remember that one's own reactions in a decisive moment would be exactly the same.

I should have done well if during the first few days in camp I had done nothing but watch and wonder, without talking, let

alone giving advice to others. Even now it weighs on my mind that I may have caused the death of a charming young Viennese woman through my cocksure advice, because I thought that I was able to gauge the situation. Her name was Gretl; she was twenty-four—a pretty, gentle girl, quiet, modest and yet poised, with blue eyes and enchanting brown curls. Everybody liked her, and on our journey she had been first favourite with the guards. Altogether, healthy and strong, she was one of those who had a chance to survive.

She told me her story—one of the countless tragedies of our time. Her father was an “Aryan”, her mother a Jewess. They were divorced, and Gretl was brought up in the Jewish faith by her mother. This meant that according to the Racial Laws of Nuremberg she counted as a Jewess (a *Geltungsjüdin*, in the Nazi terminology). Nevertheless, she told people that she was of “mixed” blood, and so kept her job in a small hairdressing establishment in a Vienna suburb, working busily and contentedly. She lived in a free marriage with a young worker, an “Aryan”, who refused to be frightened by the danger of being sentenced for “racial pollution”, and took her into the home of his parents. Then the pair had a child, whose birth was a complicated story in itself. If the young woman had registered the child on her own papers, she would have had to say “Father unknown”, in order not to implicate her companion. But then she would have run the risk that the youth welfare authorities might have tried to trace the father, and so have discovered the whole tangle; also, the young father was happy to have a child, and wanted it to be officially recognised as his. So Gretl gave her whole wardrobe to an “Aryan” cousin of hers in exchange for the other’s identity papers, and went to the public ward of a hospital to have her child. It was entered as the illegitimate child of Gretl’s cousin and the real father. Then Gretl lived for some time in peace with her man and child, happy, if somewhat nervous because of the constant danger. Somebody who was jealous of her happiness denounced her: she was arrested and sent to Auschwitz.

On the journey she did not wear the Jewish badge, the “Star of David”, called herself half-Jewish (which she was in fact, but not by the currently valid law), and told only me about the true situation. I believed I was giving her sound advice when I said to her: “Gretl, be reasonable; tell them the truth at once when we arrive at the camp, or you’ll get into trouble; they’ll punish you, and everything’ll go wrong.” Unfortunately, the young woman agreed with me, and acted accordingly when, at last, at eleven in the morning, an S.S. man turned up, took our particulars and asked about the reasons for our detention, upon

which he decided what kind of badge (*Winkel*) we would have to wear. Political prisoners had to wear a red badge, members of the religious sect "Ernste Bibelforscher" a purple one, "anti-social" prisoners a black one, habitual criminals a green one. The badges were allotted arbitrarily. If a prostitute had been picked up while she was together with a Pole, she was given the red, "political" badge instead of the black, "anti-social" badge. If a woman had been taken into "protective custody" for overstaying her leave she had to wear the black badge, unless she had been working in a munition factory. If so she had committed the political offence of *Wehrkraftsabotage*—sabotage of the war effort—and had to wear the red badge, which carried with it certain privileges in the camp. After the distribution of badges we were given our numbers. German "Aryan" prisoners were just told theirs, but all the others had their number tattooed on the outside of their left forearm, and, if they were Jewish, the Star of David as well. If I had been tattooed it would have infuriated me, and the comparative calm with which those women submitted to the humiliating—and physically painful—procedure astounded me. Later many of them felt proud of it, as though it were a badge of honour. Gretl, too, had the star tattooed on her arm, as a "Jewess by law".

Next we had to name our occupations. When S.S. Rottenführer Klaus (incidentally a former prisoner himself) heard that I was a doctor, he said to me in a remarkably courteous tone: "You must treat your patients here exactly as if they were your private patients. Just now we've got a Frenchwoman as a doctor, who says nothing but *Oui, oui*, but her patients go on dying of typhus!"

I was agreeably surprised at the apparent human sympathy with which this man spoke of the sick. Not until later did I find out the real meaning behind his admonition.

At long last we were taken to a heated place, a big room in the central office (in camp terminology the "Sauna"). It housed the political section of the women's camp, a number of prisoners doing clerical work under the command of an S.S. officer. It struck me at once that these women were neatly, almost smartly, dressed, had plucked eyebrows and discreetly made-up lips: in fact, what I saw were a few members of the camp *élite*, who lived on a higher level than the rest of the prisoners.

The clerk who dealt with me was an elegant Polish woman. She asked: "How long do you think you'll stay in the camp?"

I said that I had been told to be prepared for one year.

With the extravagant optimism of all Poles she explained to me: "We count on its being over in two months!"

It was to be two years and two months.

S.S. Man Klaus was interested in our pretty Gretl. When he looked at the form she had filled in and saw "Father Aryan, mother Jewish", he said to her: "But, then you're mixed!" and took her to the hairdresser, whom he instructed not to crop her hair like that of other Jewish women, because in the camp she would be considered an Aryan German. This was grotesque: she had been sent to the camp precisely because she had arrogated the status of an "Aryan German" to herself. I was glad for Gretl's sake, because it seemed to improve her chances; but we had forgotten to reckon with the baseness of some of our fellow-prisoners.

In the meantime we had undressed. The heads of all the women except the Germans were shaved with a hair-clipper, and our clothes were stuffed into big sacks. My shoes were thick with mud from the road, but they were wrapped into my suit as they were, and so I found them, complete with mud, after the liberation in Dachau (even though my costume and fur coat had been stolen). We went into the hot-air room, and afterwards had a cold shower. During all that time we walked about stark naked, while some S.S. men were going to and fro, apparently without taking any interest in us. The women did not mind the men overmuch. We were too tired and too tense to pay attention to them, though later some women, mostly Frenchwomen, mentioned to me that it was in fact the presence of the men which they had found particularly terrible. The official attitude of the camp authorities in matters of public decency was contradictory, as in most other matters. Once the head wardress saw from a distance of 200 yards that a girl sitting in front of our hut had drawn her dress up above her knees, and was highly incensed. On the following day a great number of women walked naked across the camp road to the disinfection hut, past male prisoners and S.S. men who were repairing roofs, and nobody objected.

When I was in the hot-air room and saw the shower-baths, things seemed much less black.

"How often may we come here and have a bath?" I naïvely asked one of the bath assistants.

"Once—when you are released," she answered.

"And where do we wash?" I inquired, a little less self-assured.

She shrugged: "It's a matter of luck."

She was right, and it was my best piece of luck in the camp that from the beginning I had the opportunity of washing every day.

Then the camp clothes were handed out to us. Rottenführer Klaus had given orders "to dress the doctor decently". So I was given a coarse linen shift, a pair of blue-and-white striped calico

drawers, a short-sleeved cotton jumper, a pair of fairly decent rayon stockings, which I had to roll under my knees because I had no belt or garters, a new prison dress striped in grey and blue, made of a thick material in the shape of a sack, a long jacket of the same material, a square white scarf for the head and a pair of canvas shoes with wooden soles. I wore those shoes three days, and cannot have walked more than 600 yards in them; then one of my legs became sore. I got a pair of leather boots instead. But the other prisoners had to walk every day six miles to and from their place of work in the fields in the same sort of clogs; it is a wonder to me that they ever managed it. Subsequently there was always a number of patients whose toes or feet had been amputated because of gangrenous sores or frost-bite.

The clothing I was given was clean and in good repair. The others got approximately the same, but in a less decent condition. The Jewish women were given the uniforms of dead Russians, which had only one advantage—that of including trousers which could be stuffed into the boots. None of us looked particularly beautiful. When Gretl was given one of those uniforms she protested quietly, but firmly, and pointed out that her hair had not been shaved, since she was counted as a German. The Capo of the establishment, a brutal vulgar female, who used to denounce and trick her fellow-prisoners and had been, in private life, the proprietress of a Munich brothel, shouted at her, hit her over the head with a stick and dragged her back to the hairdresser, shrieking: "Off with her hair; the only thing that counts with me is the tattoo mark!" The girl looked round imploringly, but her protector, the S.S. man, was no longer near. Five minutes later she stood there with a close-cropped head, almost unrecognisable in a dirty Russian uniform which was much too small for her. And for the first time she shed tears. Also a beautiful Russian woman wept for the first time when her black curls were shorn off. I did not quite understand it: I believe that the loss of my hair—which, after all, grows again—would have impressed me least. But nearly all the others agreed that they had found it almost the worst of all—worse than the tattooing. As a matter of fact, cropping of the hair was one of the most dreaded penalties in the camp.

I waved good-bye to Gretl, then she was taken to the Jewish block. Later I heard that she tried on another occasion to stand up for her rights. It involved her in a quarrel with the absolute ruler of her hut, the Hut Senior; she was transferred to the punishment company. It meant the death sentence for her. At that time it was practically impossible for a Jewish woman to survive a term in a punishment unit. If she had not followed my

advice, if from the beginning she had insisted on her mixed "Aryan-Jewish" origin, she would not have been tattooed, and, as a "German political prisoner", she would have been given a good job in the camp. The group of half-Jewish prisoners was subjected to a special check in the late summer of 1943; then they, too, were tattooed with the Jewish star and transferred to Ravensbrück Camp. But by that time Gretl might have got beyond the worst stage in the camp.

While in the camp we had become so callous that I gave no more than a few fleeting thoughts to that splendid human being who died miserably, senselessly, like countless others. Only now, when I am writing these lines, I remember her with deep sorrow.

When we had been allotted our new clothes, our prison numbers were sewn on to dress and jacket.

By the time we were all ready it was 3 p.m. We were starving. Now, they did not let us go hungry "with intent". That is to say, there was nobody who had decided that new arrivals should go without food on their first day in camp. We did not eat because we had not been put on a "bread list". The hut clerks delivered their so-called food reports at a fixed hour of the day. It meant that they reported the number of prisoners in their huts, who had to get their meals there, and then they fetched the corresponding rations from the kitchen. As there were new arrivals every day, it would not have been very difficult to put aside a pail of soup for them; but nobody saw to it, because nobody had a personal interest in it.

We had had our last meal in the morning of the previous day. At that period the general food situation in German prisons was very bad, and they could spare very little for prisoners in transit, if only because every journey upset the rationing system. This meant that it was unavoidable that we should go hungry. Our journey had lasted four days; others took as much as a fortnight to four weeks. Imagine, then, the physical state, the weakened stamina, of those women prisoners who came into the camp, and into a life which put the severest strain on the bodily and mental resources of anyone who dared to make an attempt at surviving!

On that first day I made the acquaintance of one of the very worst features of camp life—something to which I never grew accustomed. I had asked a girl about the w.c. With a condescending smile which may have been provoked by my term "w.c.", she took me along to the room which had to serve for the defecation of 6,000–7,000 women. It was a large shed—32 feet by 16 feet—with windows and a cement gangway in the middle. To the right and left of the gangway, which measured about six feet

across, there were low walls, seven inches thick, on which the women were sitting in rows like swallows on a telegraph wire. The door was always open, and anyone could look in through the windows. Behind each wall was a six-foot-deep trench which debouched into a sewer. At the other end of the trench an iron pipe came down to the height of the wall, and from there a thin jet of water fell into the ditch. It was supposed to scour the fæces into the sewer. But those two water-pipes were also the only sources of water available to the 13,000 prisoners of the camp, apart from the water in the kitchen and in the shower-baths, which was accessible only to those who worked there. Thus all those who wanted to snatch a few drops of water for tea or for washing flocked to the two iron pipes of the latrine. I, too, went there every evening for weeks to get a bucket of water for washing, in a free-for-all fight.

The women arrived with pails, mugs and bottles, shouting and jostling each other to get their turn at the water. The result was that none of it reached the latrine ditches, and the sewage system was blocked. From time to time one of the prefects would come and strike at the women with a stick to drive them off. The whole thing was incredibly brutal, yet it was impossible to condemn either the women who were kicking at one another or the "guardians" of the latrine. It is dreadful to be without water; it is impossible to let people take away all the water while fæces are piling up in the ditches!

Apart from this so-called "Aryan w.c.", which was out of bounds for Jewish women, though this regulation was generally disregarded, there also existed a "Jewish w.c.". I did not see it at that stage—I had had enough of the other sight. Then I fell ill, was sent away to an outlying working party, and when I came back conditions had improved somewhat. A washing-room existed with a number of taps; the hospital huts and even some of the regular camp huts had one water-tap each; a hot-water boiler had been set up in the central office (the "Sauna") and the medical personnel were permitted to have a daily shower; the other prisoners were taken there in turns, a hut at a time. This put an end to the very worst calamity. Nevertheless, this improvement came only after a year of conditions such as I have already described.

By the time I had seen that hellish place we had reached the stage when we were to be taken to the various huts. There were two huts ("blocks") for German prisoners, one for the "black" and "green" ones, another for the "red". Together with two others from our transport, I was taken to the political hut. Built on the pattern of the reception hut where we had waited all the

morning, it was packed with three-tiered bunks. A row of them was rigged up along each wall; then there was a free space of about three feet, and a row of bunks ranged at a right angle to the first. Between the second row of bunks and the "heating-bench" in the middle of the room, there was a passage five feet wide, crowded with women who made a deafening noise. For quite a long time I sat and stared at the turmoil, dumbfounded by the thought that people were supposed to live like this for years on end.

Nobody took any notice of me. I was utterly alone. A heavy, oppressive sense of fear gripped me. I found it hard to breathe. What would come next? Fortunately I had not much time to indulge in dark thoughts. I had to find a place to sleep. It was all so very different from prison. There, in the cell, you had to be passive; everything was allotted to you; you were pushed hither and thither—but you could be lazy. Here in the camp you had to be active—constantly, intensely busy getting the most urgent necessities.

When I realised that I should not automatically get a bed, I went up to a woman who was distributing tea and asked her how I could get a place to sleep. She happened to be in charge of the room services; apart from that, she was a dancer from Rumania, and quite crazy. First of all she explained to me that there was no empty bunk, I should have to slip in beside somebody else. Then the two of us started on our round. It was almost funny to hear her praise me, just as a street-hawker may praise his wares. "She's a nice, quiet sort of woman; let her sleep with you; she's fresh from the bath and really hasn't got any lice!" Or; "Take her in with you; she's from Vienna you know the song, 'Vienna, Vienna' . . ." The women whom she addressed turned round indignantly and protested; they had to be on their feet at five in the morning, and wanted at least room to stretch themselves in their beds. But, on the other hand, I could not very well sleep on the bare floor. In the end we found a Czech woman who saw the point and was kind to me. So I got at least half a bed. It was high time; they were beginning to turn off the lights and to set up dirty, uncovered buckets for the night, so that we should not have to go to the latrine.

This involved me in a little adventure. A young girl told me to empty one of the full buckets. As a newcomer I did not want to refuse a small service. I picked up the bucket and asked where I should empty it.

"Anywhere," she said, and pushed me through the door.

There I stood in the dark with my burden, and wondered which way to turn. "Anywhere?" I thought. "Surely that's not possible?" Well, anything seemed to be possible in this place. I

went straight on without meeting anybody whom I could have asked, until I was afraid of losing my way back to the hut in the darkness. Then I saw a ditch next to me. Quickly I emptied my bucket and took it back. The next day I saw that it had been the ditch by the side of the main road of the camp. Of course it was strictly prohibited to empty ordure there, and if one of the wardresses had caught me at it she would have pushed my face into the filth and forced me to clear it away with my hands. The girl in my hut had known all this, and yet she had sent me out without any warning. She supposed—rightly, as events proved—that I would empty the bucket somewhere nearby and be back quickly—the only thing in which she was interested. The risks I was running in my ignorance meant nothing to her. She even tried to send me out again, but then I noticed that she had no armlet. This meant—so much I knew—that she had no special function and no right to give me orders. She had simply tried her luck with me. I turned my back on her and went to sleep. Fortunately there were enough blankets, so I was not cold.

The woman sleeping above me turned heavily in her bunk, and from her palliase a cloud of dust silted through the boards down on to me. I passed my hand over my face and caught three lice which had fallen there. Then I remembered a lonely poster outside the door of our hut, which I had seen hanging from its pole, yellowed, neglected and dilapidated. It showed the gigantically amplified picture of a louse, with a caption in German and Polish: "One louse—your death!" So three lice would be . . . I did not work it out, mercifully, but dozed off and slept the dreamless sleep of exhaustion till the next morning.

A fellow-prisoner in Dachau Camp once said to me after our liberation: "As you worked in the hospital practically from the first day, you don't know what the camp really means." In a way he was right. Anyone who did not work on the land, as a simple prisoner without a special function or post, never experienced the full hardship of camp life on his or her own body. If I believe that I do know the full meaning of "concentration camp", it is because through my work in the hospital I dealt with the flotsam and jetsam of the camp. All the women who could no longer stand that life broke down and came to us as wrecks, in a desperate condition—all the countless women who arrived in the sick ward day after day, and who told me the story of their sufferings—they made me understand, through intimate experience and deep compassion, what the camp meant.

I did not see much of the regular camp life. What I found worst during the first few days was the roll-call (*Zählappell*, at

which the numerical strength of prisoners was checked) in the morning and evening. It lasted between two and three hours, as the girl in Brno had said. Fortunately I was exempted as soon as I started work in the camp hospital.

A roll-call was the most sacred thing in the camp; indeed, life revolved round the question whether the roll had been complete or not. At the time of my arrival this was the procedure: at the sound of a whistle the "Aryan" prisoners had to form up in front of their huts, in rows of five; the Jewish prisoners had to line up on the camp road. It was fairly easy to count the groups outside the huts, but it puzzled me how the milling thousands of Jewish women on the camp road could ever be counted. I never found out why they had to go out on to the road; the only reason which occurred to me was that between the Jewish huts there was not a single spot where one did not sink to the knees into mire and marshy soil. Several months later the Jewish women were ordered to form up in front of their huts, too, and then the roll-calls finished more quickly. When all the prisoners were outside, the wardresses—their title was *Blockführer* (hut leader)—went to the huts and counted the prisoners lined up there. The sum total of those single figures was compared with the total figure worked out from the lists. If the two figures tallied, the whistle was sounded again and the prisoners were dismissed. If they failed to tally, the grave problem arose whether the count had been faulty, or the sums had been added up wrongly, or one of the prisoners had run away.

The working out of the total strength on paper was the duty of the "roll-clerk", who held one of the most important and influential posts in the camp. At first several German prisoners had been tried out in the job, but they had been hopeless. It was not a simple calculation. Every day there were arrivals, departures, deaths, admissions to the hospital, releases from hospital, transfers to and from outlying working parties, transfers from one hut to another; and a single slip would ruin the whole result. During the roll-call the wardresses would check, and check again, count and count again, while the women had to stand there in the open, endlessly. In the end the post of roll-clerk was given to an intelligent Jewish woman who had worked a lot with timber computations in civilian life; then at least the total on paper was worked out correctly. As far as the actual counting was concerned, the "hut leaders" wanted to finish their shift as soon as possible, and so they often reported the figure which the hut was supposed to have, without checking on it. This would happen for days on end, and when a mistake was discovered, it was just as likely to have occurred days before.

In the early months the roll-call hardly ever tallied. No one knew how many of the prisoners were alive and how many dead. Women died on the road, they jumped into pits, where their bodies were found days later; the Hut Seniors did not know the inmates of their huts and did not notice if someone was missing. In addition, there was a babylonian confusion of languages. In German, Polish, Russian, in Czech and in French, in all languages people were shouting and babbling. The result was chaos. This explains how it could happen that the young girl in our transport who had escaped from the camp in October and was brought back in February was greeted with surprise: nobody had noticed her absence. It also happened that people were reported dead and their relatives informed of it, while afterwards it turned out to be an error which had to be rectified. Consequently some general roll-calls were held to remedy the situation. At seven o'clock on a Sunday morning all the women prisoners would be marched to a field outside the camp, and counted there. As they also had to listen to a speech, the whole affair usually lasted till four in the afternoon, and they had to go without food all that time. The last of these general roll-calls took place on a Sunday in early March, shortly after my arrival in the camp. On the following Monday I had forty new patients in my hut, instead of the usual daily average of fifteen.

In this, too, things improved with time. When a commission from Berlin visited the camp in spring, 1944, and inquired about the average duration of a roll-call, the head wardress boldly claimed that it was usually finished within a quarter of an hour. In fact there existed a decree from H.Q. in Berlin which fixed the maximum length of a roll-call at half an hour. On the other hand, the S.S. was responsible for the numerical strength of the prisoners, which could be checked only by counting, so roll-calls inevitably took three to four hours every time something went wrong. Sometimes the prisoners hit upon peculiar methods for speeding up a roll-call. On one occasion in one of the adjoining camps it seemed impossible to make the figures tally. Some prisoners saw a body lying on the railway track which ran past their camp, and borrowed the corpse. It was included in the count, and then everything checked up to the satisfaction of prisoners and S.S. guards.

As a doctor, I was constantly faced with the problem of what to do with patients who were no longer really ill, but weak, and therefore liable to catch another illness. Obviously I should have liked to keep all of them in the sick ward, but somehow I had to free beds for new patients as well. From time to time I decided to dismiss a number of convalescents. There was always the possi-

bility of putting them down for "hut convalescence", which meant that for some time they did not have to go to work and were allowed to stay in their huts during the day. Nevertheless, they had to be present at roll-calls. Now, in the sick ward patients were not allowed to be out of bed, not even for a few hours; they had no clothes, only their nightdress, unless they managed to get something else in an underhand way; also there was literally no room for many patients walking about in the ward. This meant that a sick woman had to stay in bed up to her very last day in hospital, to be fetched out at six o'clock the next morning. Then she was given clogs and a coat, which she had to put on over her nightdress, but no underclothing and no stockings. In this state she had to walk five minutes to the central office; if she was unlucky, she had to wait there one or two hours, in an unheated room, after which she was put under an ice-cold shower and given new clothing. From the office she had to go to her hut, which as a rule was not heated either, and in the evening she had to stand outside the hut during the hours of the roll-call. In summer this was just bearable; in winter it merely meant that the women returned to hospital the next day.

After the roll-call the working parties formed up and marched away. I cannot report about the work done by prisoners from my own experience, as I worked only in the hospital, inside the camp. To judge by the information my patients gave me, it varied very much. There were groups which did nothing at all. This did not mean that the prisoners posted to them had a pleasant life; every day they had to walk several miles in heavy clogs, with torn stockings, and stay the whole day out in the open, in every sort of weather; but they did nothing more—to take the example of the tree-nurseries—than cut off or pick up branches, until they were marched back to camp.

A very pretty young prostitute from Vienna who was forewoman—Capo—of one of the working parties told me: "I don't do any work at all. I go to the ponds outside, with a hundred Jewish women. There the S.S. man who escorts me starts fishing. I fry the fish he catches, and we eat them together. In the meantime the Jewesses cart round some pieces of turf and pile them up somewhere, I don't know what for. Every now and then one of the S.S. chiefs comes round, shouts at us and says our whole work stinks, so then the Jewesses have to pile up the turf somewhere else. I don't bother about them; I go and fry my fish."

She was a so-called "good" Capo—a prefect who left the other prisoners in peace as long as she herself was left in peace; presumably frying fish was not the only thing she did for the S.S. man. Other Capos beat the prisoners of their unit, mainly

because they themselves were kept under permanent pressure, and other groups had to work frantically. The decisive factor was whether the Camp Command was particularly interested in the work that had to be done or not.

A patient who suffered from T.B. told me that she had been Capo of a working-party consisting of a hundred Jewesses. In March, when the ponds near the camp had scarcely lost their ice, those hundred women had to wade into the water up to their waists and cut the rushes with sickles. This had to be done every day. The rushes were dried and used for the potato dumps. Every day fresh people were posted to that working party, because, of the hundred women who were driven into the water in the mornings, as a rule only eighty or ninety came back. Quite apart from the obvious human considerations, the waste of manpower was incredible, and not in this case alone. Hundreds of men and women walked to and fro for hours on end, carrying two or three bricks—or even a single brick—to a building site, from a place a mile away. Ten men with a push-cart would have brought more bricks in a day than those emaciated people carried in a week, but the Camp Command was not willing to supply the wood for such a cart. On the other hand, even large-scale work was done by women. The girls in the punishment company pulled the heaviest trucks, built mile-long dams, dismantled aircraft, and so forth.

Later, when modern factories had been built round the camp, labour was treated on one hand with greater economy, on the other with a more systematic exploitation. Among those factories were S.S. plants, such as the D.A.W. (Deutsche Ausrüstungswerke), and munitions works of big firms under the control of the Wehrmacht. Auschwitz was considered the most important camp in all Germany from the point of view of the war effort: hence the rumours that the camp was going to be converted into a joint-stock company. Siemens, Wanderer-Autounion and the Buna works of the I.G. Farbenindustrie had all built huge plants near the camp, and we had to supply the manpower. As a rule the prisoners were glad to be posted there, although it was often very dangerous work and there were many explosions and other accidents. But they were at least in dry, lighted and heated rooms; the work, if strenuous, was regular; food and medical supplies were somewhat better. In exchange, an enormous amount of work was demanded. The women had little understanding of the method of a collective passive resistance through "going slow". This was particularly true of the German "anti-social" prisoners, and of a number of the Jewish women. They would often tell with pride about their great daily output, and so further their own exploitation.

The firms paid the S.S. up to 13 Reichsmark per day for each skilled male worker, and proportionally less for other workers and women. For this the S.S. undertook to provide the prisoners with accommodation, food and clothing. The "accommodation" was our huts; food was produced by other prisoners working on the land, in bakeries and slaughter-houses within the vast precincts of the camp; the clothing was sewn by prisoners or, when the stock of uniform dresses with their blue-and-grey stripes was exhausted, we wore clothes from the wardrobes of gassed Jews—clothes marked on the back with a broad red dab in oil paint. Thus the expenses of the S.S. consisted merely in the scanty medicaments and the pay of the camp guards. The difference between the real expenses and the hire paid by the firms was the net profit of the S.S. The total number of inmates of all the camps belonging to the Auschwitz group was certainly far more than 100,000, and it may be assumed that at least half of them were sold on that slave market. This will give an idea of the sums involved. In 1944, when the home consumption, so to speak, was satisfied, an export drive began. Outlying working parties of Auschwitz went as far as Trautenau, Gablonz, Neustadt, and many other towns, where "subsidiary camps" of Auschwitz were set up, and supplied with human material from the centre.

We, the Auschwitz prisoners, were much in demand. The staff managers of big firms came to the camp to select women for their plants. It was an odd experience for us to see men in civilian clothes. They would arrive with somewhat embarrassed expressions on their faces; the women had to form up for their benefit, so that they could make sure of getting strong young girls; and it looked as if at any moment they would pinch their leg and arm muscles to test them. One manager would take 100 "pieces", another 500 or 1,000, plus a few nurses or a couple of women doctors, and then another customer would turn up. We never felt sure whether it was an advantage or a disadvantage to be taken away. Certainly it meant the danger of bombing raids; and perhaps the only thing to comfort us in the torture of camp life was the fact that the Allied airmen knew and avoided the camp. On the other hand, it was tempting not to sit behind electrified wire at a time when the end of the war was in sight. We heard that there was more freedom of movement and better food in the small factory camps, but women who were brought back to Auschwitz unfit for work, with crippled limbs, told tales of cruel exploitation. In some cases they were not allowed to go down to the shelters during air raids, and the most terrible labour accidents occurred when they were racked by nervous fear. Many of

those transports of "human duds" were sent direct into the gas chambers on their return to the camp.

In spite of everything, most prisoners in the camp suffered from an incorrigible optimism. Again and again they hoped that their fate would become less severe. They took every small improvement for a sign that the attitude of the S.S. had changed. But their hopes were senseless. The small changes were nothing but variations on a fixed theme, which ran: arbitrary detention, physical and mental suffering, exploitation, sickness and death. In reality, there was only one hope for us: the end of the war and Allied victory.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE ORGANISATION OF A WOMEN'S CONCENTRATION CAMP

OPTIMISTS OCCASIONALLY ask me whether the treatment of women in concentration camps was not, after all, slightly better than that of the men. As far as the women's concentration camp of Birkenau-Auschwitz is concerned, I have to answer both yes and no. Compared with the average treatment of male prisoners, the sadistic maltreatment of individual women prisoners did play a minor role; but for all that it existed, in an official as well as in an unofficial form.

Like the men, women were given floggings of twenty-five strokes on the "block". Himmler personally introduced the measure on one of his visits to Ravensbrück Camp during the war. Sometimes the Gestapo would send women to a camp with the instruction to give them a flogging of twenty-five or fifty strokes right at the beginning. This happened most frequently to the "Poles' wenches". When the Camp Command wanted to apply such a punishment to a woman prisoner for an offence committed in camp, they had first to forward the application to Berlin and then wait for an authorisation.

I knew a pretty young woman who had twice been given a flogging of twenty-five strokes at Ravensbrück Camp because she had a love affair with a Pole. Between the floggings they had put her for three days into the "standing bunker", where cold water was let into the cell every two hours until it reached her chin. When I saw her in Auschwitz three years later she was suffering from a chronic inflammation of the ovaries. This was not an exceptional case, though I personally did not meet many women in our camp who had contracted a serious chronic illness as a result of those official punishments.

It rarely happened that women were executed. I heard of several cases, but during my time in camp it was not an everyday occurrence, as it was in the men's camps. That is to say, individual executions of women were infrequent—the mass gassing of Jewish women is another matter, with which I shall deal separately. Once a young Jewess, who had attempted to escape and was recaptured, forestalled her public execution by cutting her artery. She died with the words: "My death doesn't matter,

but you swine will come to a miserable end." Non-Jewish women who attempted to escape were as a rule flogged, a penalty which failed to prevent numerous attempts of the kind, some of them successful. Like everything else in the camp, flogging was meted out arbitrarily. Sometimes the blow would fall on hard-boiled girls who had gone in for wholesale trafficking in jewellery or spirits, sometimes on quiet women who had done nothing. Once one of the female prefects was given two floggings of twenty-five strokes because a woman in her group had escaped; on another occasion one of the prefects was punished just as heavily because she had "organised" a tailored jacket for herself. This happened while most of us were going about in "organised" clothes, with the unofficial knowledge and toleration of the Camp Command; for some obscure reason that particular prefect had been singled out, that was all.

I must admit that heavy corporal punishment was not frequent in our camp, which therefore had the name of a "mild" camp. The majority of the victims were German "anti-social" prisoners—that is, prostitutes—while most of the political prisoners I knew were spared. To judge by reports, flogging was used far more in Ravensbrück Camp.

We had also the "standing" bunker and the "water" bunker—cells for special punishment. Then there was standing or kneeling for a certain length of time, and there was the cropping of the hair. But a comparatively small number of prisoners were victimised in this way. The usual penalty was transfer to a "punishment company". Later, life in such a unit was not very different from life in the camp itself, and there was even a time when there was more room for sleeping in the hut of the punishment company than in the overcrowded huts of the other prisoners. Only those who had enjoyed the privileges and better conditions connected with a special function found it hard to be transferred to a punishment unit.

Another official punishment, not subjected to a special authorisation from Berlin, was the so-called "Stalin-swing". The prisoner had to sit on the floor with her knees drawn up to her chin and her arms locked round her legs. Then a bar was pushed under the hollow of her knees, and lifted so that the victim was hanging from it. An S.S. man would tip the woman on her shoulder, she would start swaying, and at every swing another S.S. man would hit her on the buttocks with a stick or a whip. Between the strokes she would be asked if she was now willing to speak. This procedure was used in the investigation of offences. I was often told, by prisoners as well as by S.S. men, that the women showed an astounding resistance. The political prisoners, in the first line the Polish women, were said to be particularly

tough. A rather simple girl once said to me: "My goodness, it's no more painful than having a child." When I objected that it must be terrible to be humiliated in that fashion, she replied that "we women had known for a long time that men were brutes, which did not alter the fact that we got the upper hand in the end". Actually, it was my impression that men suffered more under the flogging than women, and felt their humiliation at the hands of fellow-men more deeply. Perhaps, though, the men were more savagely beaten than the women.

Side by side with those official punishments there existed the unofficial ill usages, such as blows, kicks, knocks and slaps in the face. I must say that the honour of meting them out was evenly* divided between the S.S. and the prisoner "functionaries"—that is, the Capos, instructors (*Anweiser*), Hut Seniors and camp seniors. This was partly due to the inbred brutality of women who were professional criminals or prostitutes, still more brutalised by years of imprisonment, and partly to the difficulty of keeping discipline among a multitude of resentful women, most of them speaking foreign languages and determined upon a maximum of passive resistance. The truth was that only experts at physical brutality could hope to hold down one of those special prisoners' jobs for any length of time.

The number of women who suffered under unofficial ill-usage was large. Most of the prisoners who worked on the land and were clumsy at it, because of the unaccustomed nature of the work, complained bitterly of maltreatment. Again the Jewish women bore the brunt, as was to be expected. Acts of incredible brutality were committed. One of the prisoners in our camp was a certain Liesel Neumann, who years before, known under the nickname "the Venus of Wedding" (a Berlin slum district), had been a gang leader of juvenile criminals and murdered a watchmaker in the north of Berlin. She was put in charge of over a hundred women prisoners; before she died of typhus she managed to kill a number of Jewish women. In Buddy, where a working party was quartered in a school building, German criminal prisoners made common cause with the S.S. Together they exploited an unimportant incident to stage a Jew-baiting. Over ninety women were first man-handled and then thrown from a window on the second floor into the school yard. A single young girl survived. She reported it to the Camp Commandant when he inspected the place. Illogically, since the authorities themselves were carrying through and promoting the mass murder of Jews, the "heroes" of the outrage were punished. The prisoners among them were sent for periods from one to three years to punishment companies, the S.S. men were posted elsewhere.

I often saw women prisoners with injuries from dog-bites, after wardresses had set their Alsatians on them; I saw eyes suffused with blood, swollen ears, and so forth. Once I saw a few wardresses, one of them the Head Wardress and Camp Leader Mandel, savagely beating prisoners. A small fire had broken out in a hut and caused a panic, the women had jumped out of the window, and were received with blows outside. Then, as on other occasions, I had the impression that the S.S. women were hitting out not so much from sadism as because they were afraid of not being able to master the situation. They seemed to lash out from a feeling that, though armed, they were in a hopeless minority among innumerable prisoners. Perhaps this was the reason why female S.S. were more addicted to beating than their male colleagues.

All this would have been horrible in a normal, civilian world, where every single case would have created a scandal; even in our atmosphere it was bad enough. Yet compared with our general living conditions it played an insignificant role. The deaths and cases of grave, permanent physical injury caused by those acts of brutality were, comparatively speaking, not so very numerous. Also it has to be said that a certain number of S.S. men who in the men's camp were notorious floggers had some ultimate inhibitions in the face of women and restrained themselves. Some S.S. men felt compassion, and would not beat for the sake of principle.

In any case, whatever ill usage there was—and the least would have been too much—it seemed unimportant compared with the terrible conditions of life in the camp and their disastrous effects on the lives and health of the women prisoners. In this respect the women's concentration camps were worse than the men's. Every single little improvement—every new building, every stove, every lamp—had to be wrested from the Camp Command. The men, however, had various other ways in which they could improve matters. Many of them were put to work in S.S. factories or in other workshops and plants, and could smuggle material into the camp. In the ranks of the prisoners were men of every profession; they were themselves able to manufacture what they most needed. They built their houses, they made tables and cupboards, they installed water and electric light, they put in windows, repaired walls, did all sorts of repairs without too much difficulty. We were dependent on working parties from the men's camp to come over, officially or unofficially, and do the most urgently needed work for us.

For all these reasons the level of accommodation and hygiene, and with it the level of health, was far lower in the women's camps than in the men's. At least in the central camp at Auschwitz the men were quartered in brick-built houses with cellars;

there were decent, clean roads between the blocks, and even small lawns with flower-beds outside the doors; there was a sports-ground where they played football on Sundays. Meanwhile, in our women's camp we were sitting in draughty, windowless huts and sinking ankle-deep in mud every time we had to walk from one hut to another. Certainly there existed men's camps, too, which had our sort of converted stables for huts. In fact, all concentration camps started looking like ours, and were transformed out of nothing by the prisoners themselves, with the primitive means at their disposal. But it took the men very much less time to make their camp somewhat bearable than it took the women prisoners.

When I came to the women's concentration camp at Birkenau-Auschwitz in February, 1943, it was laid out on the usual pattern: there was a wide camp road in the middle, and three rows of huts, each row consisting of three "blocks", on either side, with the kitchen at the extreme left and the reception hut at the extreme right. On one side were the so-called "good" blocks, which housed the hospital, the clothes and shoes store, the clerks' offices, the prisoner-functionaries and the German prisoners. Those were the windowless stables, all built like the reception hut which I described in the preceding chapter. Their doors still bore the notice-boards with the regulations of the veterinary police, which demanded a thorough-going decontamination of the premises every time one of the horses in the stable contracted an infectious disease. The regulations did not hold good for human beings.

In some of the stables the ground was floored with bricks, but mostly the floor was of beaten earth. The camp was situated in a marshy district. But it was some time before the passages in the huts were cemented, which certainly made them less damp, but probably even colder than before. Stoves were set up only in the course of the first winter I spent there, and some of the huts could not be heated till the very end of that winter. At both ends of each hut a huge brick stove was placed, the pipe of which ran the whole length of the hut along the floor, parallel to the pipe coming from the opposite stove. This formed a sort of heated bench about two feet high. When there was enough fuel the stoves worked quite well, and even the draughty sheds were more or less heated. But in the winter of 1943 to 1944 my hut—one of the wards of the hospital—was heated on no more than fifteen occasions. For the rest of the time we had to depend on the animal warmth of the patients' bodies—on what we called the "warin-blood heating system". A few of the huts had a sort of lobby at one end, so that the wind did not sweep the interior every time the door opened.

On both sides of those lobbies were the most coveted "luxury" rooms, reserved for the Hut Seniors, other prisoners holding superior jobs in the camp, and—in the hospital huts—the prisoner-doctors. Any one of us who managed to grab a place for herself in one of those rooms felt like a queen. They had at least a boarded floor and a small iron stove, which kept the room warm on very little fuel, most of it stolen. There one could heat water for cooking or washing, and so keep oneself and one's things clean. In the evenings we had something like a private life in such a room.

For six months I looked longingly at those rooms, as though at a barred paradise. Then I spent eighteen months in a little closet with a single window opening into the sick-ward; I shared it with five other women-doctors. And in spite of its mice and its bugs the room was a little home to me, and it helped all of us to bear the camp.

But only 400 to 500 women in the whole camp lived on this scale. An additional 1,500 to 2,000 had a fairly tolerable existence in small, clean huts: they were members of the band, office clerks, kitchen and stores personnel, those posted to the political department, and a few others. Even the good quarters were very damp, and only people not susceptible to tuberculosis could live there without detriment to their health; but life was at least possible. All the other prisoners were condemned to freeze miserably, to have no place where they could dry their clothes, no place to keep their things except the bed (and that, too, was officially prohibited, as no prisoner was allowed private possessions). They had to "organise" wash-basins, because officially there were none except in the sick wards. Most newcomers to the camp had to wait six to eight weeks before they found an opportunity for washing. Only the hospital had night-clothes. The women prisoners would work the whole day, stand in the pouring rain for two hours or more during roll-call, and go to bed in sweaty, wet clothes, to wake the next morning at five, chilled to the bone and forced to get on to their tired feet. Despite repeated campaigns against vermin, it was never possible to get rid of the rats. I saw several women whose toes had been gnawed by rats while they were asleep, and I saw one whose nose had been bitten. And then there were lice—lice—lice!

It was worst in the huts on the other side of the camp road. They were extremely low stone buildings which had been erected during the first world war for Russian prisoners. They had no beds at all. Stone partitions reaching up to the ceiling divided them into two parts, each of which was subdivided by short, rib-like walls jutting out from the partitions. Between the ribs boards were

fixed in three tiers; they made bunks open on one side, which looked like animals' lairs in a zoo. In some cases the middle bunks had windows, but all the lower bunks were without light. The floor-boards of each bunk held three or four palliasses, one next to the other, on which six to eight women had to sleep, occasionally even as many as ten. It was said that a member of one of the S.S. commissions which came to visit the camp had once remarked: "You can keep rabbits like this, but not women." This was how all the Jewish and non-German women in the camp had to live, with the exception of those in special jobs: a total of about 20,000 women.

Anyone who entered the women's camp at Auschwitz was struck by the enormous differences in the appearance of the prisoners. The overwhelming majority were walking skeletons, aged and hideous, keeping on their feet as though by a miracle, wrapped in dirty, ragged, striped prisoners' clothes or in the tatters of private clothes of an indefinite colour. Then there were a certain number of women in decent striped clothes, who looked comparatively healthy and strong. These were the prisoners who had managed to get into one of the better working parties, those who received food-parcels from home, and finally those who were so robust that they resisted the camp conditions. A large percentage of the latter were Poles, Yugoslavs, Czechs or Russians, mostly women who had lived without any comfort at home, in primitive conditions, and so knew better how to adapt themselves to life in the camp. Very few among the women from Western European countries managed to keep a decent level. It was interesting to see that the Dutch women were among the dirtiest and most neglected inmates of the camp; they did not know how to help themselves without running water, while the Polish women would wash their clothes with sand in a food-bowl.

The approximately 2,500 women who had better accommodation were also better dressed, and as a rule ate very much better than the rest. Some of them had food-parcels from home, and this meant they had relatives in the country or a family which could afford black-market prices. The Polish women in particular were kept well supplied by their families, who often brought financial ruin on themselves in doing so. It was touching to see how a distant cousin would do his utmost to keep his relatives in camp alive. Yet, in spite of this, Auschwitz was the mass grave not only of the Jewish, but also of the Polish women. The number of Polish women who died in Birkenau-Auschwitz up to 1944 was estimated at 25,000.

Those of the privileged group who had no food-parcels were usually able to establish good contacts in the camp, so that, after

a time, they would get illegal extras, such as potatoes, margarine, sausage, vegetables and bread.

An incredible amount of theft and barter went on in the camp. Every morning at three a woman from the kitchen would turn up in our room, with a little bag of potatoes tied round her waist under her apron. In exchange we would give her any bread we could spare, either from the supplies some of us got from home, or out of rations left over in the hut during epidemics, when ten to twenty women died in the course of a day, many more were unconscious and thus unable to take food, and the bread rations destined for them were used by the medical personnel. This was a privilege of the hospital. Other prisoners worked in the stores or on the bread distribution, still others in the clothing depots, where they would filch things and exchange them for food. A few prisoners worked in the factories, and were in touch with civilians who would give them food in exchange for clothes, shoes, trinkets and many other things.

I was always particularly upset by the traffic in medicaments in the sick wards. A piece of bread was worth two aspirins, margarine or fat bacon was paid for with cardiazol or sulphonamides. Once I got hold of a girl who was peddling medicines in my hut, and tried to tell her that it was not right to snatch the last bites away from sick comrades in exchange for a little medicine. The girl was Jewish. She told me that she had already been on the list for the gas chamber because of general physical debility, and had decided there and then to get more food for herself. She was working in the storage rooms. Every day she carried a few ampoules back to the camp in her mouth, at the risk of the gravest penalty if the control caught her, and sold them for bread and fats. She looked well and strong, and it was difficult to blame her, as she had stolen the medicaments from the S.S., not from her fellow-prisoners. Later I found myself frequently compelled to tell my typhus patients that they should get stimulants in this way, because I simply had not enough for them.

Practically all the goods which were used for barter had been the property of Jewish prisoners. The Jews from every European country who were to be "settled" in Poland were assembled by the Gestapo in reception centres, schools or transition camps near their homes, and organised in transports. They were told that they would be put to work in Poland, and that they should take with them their clothes and tools, including medical instruments, as well as food for three days. Finally, Jewish Gestapo agents spread the rumour that it was advisable to sew valuables such as foreign currency and jewellery into their clothes. I myself had kept at home money and jewellery for a number of Jews. All

those unfortunates came to fetch their valuables before they left.

In this way the Gestapo unearthed the last hidden assets of Jews, who themselves carried them meekly to the altar of the fatherland. When new Jewish arrivals were waiting outside the camp, other prisoners would sidle up and offer to keep their things for them while they were in the baths. Many would hand over their valuables gladly and trustfully, never again to set eyes on them. In the reception office the newcomers had to undress to the skin, and their belongings were thrown on a big pile. Some were taken by the staff of the baths, the rest went into the decontamination chamber, where more were stolen. Before that things had been stolen on the transport and at every halt during the journey. What was left over was taken to the storage-rooms, where a special working party had to unpick the seams of the clothes and search for hidden valuables. This was a new opportunity for thieving, made easy by the fact that nobody could know in advance exactly what would be found in the clothes. In the end everything was sorted out and packed, which meant that it had to go through untold hands, all of which took something. The remainder was supposed to be distributed among people in the Reich who had suffered bomb damage. I saw a great many things stored in the huge depots of the Waffen S.S. at Dachau, where they had been taken when Auschwitz was cleared. The American occupation troops distributed them among the prisoners.

There was more stealing than that. Things were stolen from the workshop under the administration of the camps, from the official supplies for the camp—such as building materials and medicaments—and from the supplies to the S.S. The S.S. people stole from each other and from the prisoners. The prisoners stole from each other and from the S.S.

I remember the round trip of a pair of battle-dress trousers. An S.S. man stole them from a comrade and sold them for stolen sugar to a prisoner working in the kitchen. The prisoner gave them to his girl friend in the women's camp, from whom they were stolen by another prisoner, a prostitute. Another S.S. man "confiscated" them as "illicit property", and gave them to a second prostitute with whom he had an affair. She sold them for spirits to a wardress, who bartered them for margarine, after which they returned to the first prisoner working in the men's kitchen. Whether he gave them once more to his original girl friend or to another girl, I was unable to trace. So it happened with small things and with far more important things. And perhaps it was not altogether an evil, because even a black market is

better than none at all. But in its effect this meant a limitless demoralisation. There were prisoners who arranged with S.S. men to send home a little fortune in jewellery, precious stones and foreign currency; the loot was shared between the two parties to the smuggling. In this atmosphere it was a normal thing for the Hut Senior to distribute only part of the fat or sausage rations among her unit, particularly among the patients, and to keep the rest for her own barter trade. In time this abuse was somewhat restricted; it proved possible to find a great number of more decent prisoners for special jobs—people who did not lay hands on their comrades' rations. But the traffic never ceased entirely—a fact which supplied the Camp Command with the excellent argument: "You're starving one another to death!" Up to the very last it was impossible to eradicate stealing among fellow-prisoners. Apparently this was not so in the camps at Dachau and Buchenwald, where the political prisoners saw to it that anybody could safely leave all his worldly goods in unlocked cupboards. In Auschwitz there was little of this spirit. There were people who even in that Sodom and Gomorrah had faith in the validity of civilian ideas about property—they were lost unless they found kindly friends to protect them. As a rule we had to assume that everything would be spirited away, except things on which we were sitting or things under the eyes of a reliable guard of our choosing.

From time to time all the huts were searched, once under the personal supervision of Josef Kramer. The courage with which the women defended their possessions was astonishing. In the first hut of our hospital Kramer still discovered various things. In the second hut practically everything was hidden away when the search started—in the patients' beds, under the instrument cupboard and so on. I myself simply put my dresses on a clothes-hanger and left my hut, quite openly, when Kramer came in by the other door. When he had finished with the hut I took the things in again. If one of the S.S. had asked me about the dresses I should have answered that they had been confiscated and I had been ordered to take them to a collection centre in the camp doctor's room. In fact, all the confiscated property went there, and more than half of it was again stolen on the spot. The remainder was taken to the clothing store; the prisoners working there returned the things to their previous possessors, for friendly words or for food. The camp doctor, who was utterly disinterested in the problem of how we were dressed, lectured the medical staff and told us that our rooms had looked like the boudoirs of demi-mondaines; for this reason, and as a punishment, the hospital staff was no longer allowed to have two sets of

under-clothing, but was permitted only a single set. In the course of the next few days all of us wore our confiscated clothes, the S.S. saw and recognised them, and nobody bothered or asked about their origin.

It must be obvious that this sort of large-scale theft was possible only because the S.S. men and women, who were supposed to supervise the prisoners at their work in the stores, stole themselves, in competition and accord with the prisoners. No matter whether they were lower ranks or higher ranks, they stole, every one of them. Even the best types among the S.S., as far as we knew them in the camp, were no exception. For instance, the camp doctor, Dr. Rohde, before going on leave which he was spending with his wife, went to a Polish prisoner and asked the man to find him a nice present for her. What he got was a large pigskin dressing-case. When he returned from leave he told the prisoner that his wife had liked it very much and sent many thanks.

The goods lying about had no owner, and everyone who had anything to do with them, whether S.S. man or prisoner, non-Jew or Jew, functionary or cleaner, tried to get hold of as much as possible. Once I heard how a little S.S. man, an N.C.O., begged one of the Jewish prisoners who worked in the reception office to get him a fountain pen; the prisoner told him grumpily to come back another day, at the moment he had no time for him.

The corruption among the S.S. was past imagination. For a pullover they would post letters, for toilet soap they would carry messages to neighbouring camps, for a watch they would regularly supply foreign radio news. A Medical N.C.O. caught a young nurse with her lover, an inmate of the men's camp; for two pounds of sugar he left them alone with each other. Dr. Klein, the camp doctor, had made himself unpopular with the Hut Seniors of the hospital; they bribed one of the Medical N.C.O.s with food and cigarettes to report the doctor for "excessive intimacy with the women prisoner-doctors", so that he was transferred to the gypsy camp and we were rid of the most dangerous of anti-Semites. (I do not know if he treated the gypsies equally savagely.)

As a result of these conditions, some of the prisoners in the camp had everything they wanted, perhaps more than they used to have when they were free, and in fact they were more powerful than many an S.S. man. Again and again there were inspections, again and again scandals, many and heavy penalties were imposed, but everything failed. The first Head Wardress in Auschwitz Camp, a Frau Längenfeld, was sentenced to thirty months' hard labour. Prisoners were shot, or flogged, or degraded from their special positions—others replaced them and did exactly the

same. This stealing, or, as the camp slang called it, "organising", was up to a point officially recognised. More than once a camp doctor told us: "They'll never grant our application for this, so we'll have to 'organise' it." Thus a whole sick ward was once repaired with stolen bricks and cement; two months after the repairs were finished the Works Department of the camp granted our application to be allowed to begin the repairs. Another time a Jewish prisoner-doctor needed a watch for experiments which she had to carry through for Dr. Koenig, then the camp doctor. He lined up all the nurses—who officially were not permitted to possess watches—and ordered: "Hands up!" Then he went from one to another until he came to a young Polish nurse whose lover had given her a beautiful Swiss wrist-watch. He took the watch and gave it to the Jewish doctor. The only thing he said to the Polish girl was: "Never mind, you can organise another for yourself." On the other hand, if they wanted to break a prisoner, the possession of a watch would mean a flogging of twenty-five strokes.

Some readers of these lines may well draw the conclusion that we, the prisoners of the concentration camp, did not have such a very bad life, after all, and that anyhow our moral status was so low that we deserved to be put on the same level as the S.S. in this, since the prisoners had their share in the mass robbery combined with the murder of Jews. As far as the moral conditions among prisoners are concerned, there are several points to be remembered. First, there were a large number of real criminals in the camps—people guilty of fraud, theft or murder, pimps and prostitutes; a fact which we political prisoners felt to be almost the worst aggravation of our penalty. Those criminals had, for the first time in their lives, not the slightest reason to retain any moral inhibitions: they simply imitated the example of the S.S. They saw the large-scale robbery practised by the S.S., and thereupon stole on a smaller scale, not so much from the Jewish prisoners as from the S.S., who otherwise would have kept everything. The Jewish prisoners, on the other hand, were entitled to feel that they were only taking back their own possessions. Also, in the camp it was perfectly possible to steal on the strength of the argument that this was the only way to survive. Apart from the Poles, Czechs, Yugoslavs and better-off Germans (of course only the non-Jews), nobody received parcels; what parcels came into the camp could contain nothing but food. Any prisoner who did not get food-parcels had to steal so as not to starve to death, and every prisoner had to steal so as not to freeze. A considerable number of the political prisoners made it a rule to take only just as much as they needed in order not to starve and freeze; the better ones among

them did not go in for deals and made no profit. Such self-restraint could hardly be expected from the criminals.

In its way the greed of the S.S. was fortunate for the prisoners. It made the S.S. men vulnerable. The fate of the prisoners would have been considerably harder than it was if it had not been possible to bribe our gaolers and to play off one against the other. It was exactly the same in other concentration camps. A comrade who for years had been Capo—prisoners' foreman—in the shoe-making workshop at Dachau Camp told me that it had given him an opportunity to help many fellow-prisoners. Interrogation Officer Bach, one of the most bloodthirsty and gold-hungry S.S. leaders in Dachau, changed his girl friend every few weeks, and each time the new one had to be fitted out in the camp.

Bach would come to the Capo and say: "Look here, this young lady urgently needs a new pair of shoes."

The Capo would answer: "Well, Herr Vernehmungsführer, I could have got her a pair all right, but just now I haven't got any one left to do a fine job to measure, like this, because you've been taking away my best workers and giving them special punishment in jug."

Next day the prisoners would be released from the "bunker". Of course, it was only profitable to the men if Bach was not exactly monogamous, and had a rapid consumption of women friends.

Yet it cannot be sufficiently stressed that the circle of prisoners who had opportunities of that kind was pretty narrow, even if one includes their friends who profited from their extra supplies. It is true that among them were men and women who looked very healthy—they were the only ones who endured camp life for years. They were, apart from those who entered a camp in 1944, almost the only ones to survive, the only ones who can still give a comprehensive report on the camps.

Most of the prisoners who had to live on the normal clothing and food permitted to them died at some stage between the fourth and tenth month of their imprisonment in Auschwitz Camp. Officially the daily food ration consisted of half a litre of soup, quite generously measured, for the sick and unemployed, and a bare litre of soup for the working prisoners. In winter some pieces of swede were floating in the soup, in summer bits of stinging-nettle. During my first winter in camp every prisoner was given five blackish potatoes in addition, which were put into her mess-tin. Later, however, the potatoes, half-peeled, were put into the great soup cauldrons, and sank to the bottom, so that the distribution became even more unjust than it had been. Exceptionally lucky people discovered three times a week a shred of

meat in their soup : to each 100 litres of soup four pounds of meat or, alternatively, two pounds of margarine were supposed to be added ; but in fact it frequently happened that part of the supplement was stolen and the prisoners got the soup in its pristine form. I was unable to stomach the brew, and soon stopped trying, because it gave me bad heartburn and diarrhoea. Even after my typhus, when I often cried with hunger, I left that soup untouched. In the sick wards many basins of soup were poured away, and some of our patients literally starved to death in front of a plateful of soup. The black flour of which it was made was indigestible for weakened bowels. The soup would run out of the women's bodies unchanged from what it had been when they swallowed it. After some time the soups improved slightly, and sometimes we got spinach or soup made with fresh vegetables, mainly marrow, and pickled cabbage, which did not taste too bad. A small number of patients were given a diet consisting of soup made with semolina, oat-flakes and macaroni cooked in water, on rare occasions even in milk, which was disgustingly tasteless, but at least digestible. In addition, patients got half a small loaf—later only a third—of good white bread per day, and four dekagrams of margarine three times a week. All other prisoners got a quarter of a loaf of Army bread (of dark flour) with either four dekagrams of margarine or a slice of sausage the thickness of a little finger, or half a soft cheese the size of a hand, or half a tablespoonful of jam. In the morning and evening we had tea or coffee without sugar. In the camp extra rations were allotted alternately to the huts and to the working parties : they consisted of half an army loaf and a slice of sausage the thickness of three fingers, and were distributed at shorter or longer intervals, according to the importance of the prisoners' work. In the agricultural working parties extra rations were given twice a week. The hospital staff received them every two months. Then there were exceedingly rare distributions of a half litre of skimmed milk (later they were more frequent), and two or three times in my experience lettuce and radishes were distributed. That was the lot.

I often quarrelled with one of the camp doctors about the food. He insisted that the calorie content of our food was sufficient for our maintenance, according to scientific calculation, and if women died of starvation it was only the fault of stealing and unjust distribution by the prisoner functionaries. He never said which calorie content had been officially authorised, and would not discuss the quality of the foodstuffs or the albumen and starch or vitamin content of our diet. It may be that now, when we are used to the hunger rations of the world left us by the Nazis, the calorie content of the camp rations no longer seems so very low.

Perhaps it would have been possible, with the officially allotted foodstuffs, to retain one's weight in the camp, or at least to lose little weight, if one could have avoided physical strain and if conditions had been good otherwise. But these prerequisites did not exist. The women had been imprisoned for years, particularly the Germans among them, and they consistently lost weight. But the decisive point was that it was impossible to digest that food adequately during an illness—and the terrible epidemics spared nobody. It was impossible to recover on that food during the convalescence period, particularly as everybody who did no work got only half the soup ration.

My own case serves as an illustration. During the thirteen days of my typhus I took no food at all, except apple-juice and tea with two or three lumps of sugar per day. During the last five days I was unconscious. When I woke up after the crisis and felt a nagging hunger, my first meal was a chunk of dry army bread and a piece of the stinking, soft cheese called "Quargel" in Austria. One stomach could take it, another could not. Three months after my illness I looked a living corpse, and I recovered only when I received many food parcels from home.

Once the camp doctor wanted to take blood tests, for a scientific analysis, from ten women who had been a year in the camp and lived on nothing but the official camp rations. He was unable to carry out his piece of research because it was not possible to find ten such women among the 25,000 then in the camp: they did not exist, because those who had entered the camp a year before had either had additional food or had died.

When I came into the camp in February, 1943, it had been in existence for eleven months. In March, 1942, the first thousand women had arrived at Auschwitz from Ravensbrück Camp, and the first thousand Jewish women from Czechoslovakia, to start the women's concentration camp at Birkenau. Those women lived for five months in some houses in the men's camp, while the huts in Birkenau were being set up. In August, when the hutments were at a pinch usable, the women moved into the new camp. On February 20th, 1943, I was given the number 36,088. At that time only about 13,000 women out of the 36,087 who had arrived before me were still alive. Of the thousand German women prisoners whom the camp doctor at Ravensbrück had selected as being "particularly strong", and most of whom held privileged positions, only 160 were still alive. The majority of these latter were set free in the course of the following two years; between twenty and thirty died in the camp of tuberculosis. Of 230 "Aryan" Frenchwomen who had arrived in the camp four weeks before me, 180 still survived when I came. In August, 1943, when

they were to be transported elsewhere, and were therefore assembled in the quarantine hut, only forty-five were left. My own transport consisted of ten German, thirteen Jewish and seventeen Russian and Polish women prisoners. In May, 1944, I had a chance to look up the list of arrivals in the office; it had short notes recording the further fate of the prisoners. All the Jewish women of my transport were dead. Of the German women, one lived, apart from myself. Thirteen of the Russians and Poles still survived. The lower mortality rate among the last group was explained by the fact that practically all of them were young, robust land-workers who had run away from their work on farms; they endured the camp better than the others. The Polish women of all ages who came from towns showed the same mortality rate as the Germans. I could continue these figures endlessly; the picture would always be the same.

The circumstance that the Camp Command itself decided in the end—that is to say, when the man-power of the prisoners was needed for war production—to wipe out the worst abuses is in itself an indication of the terrible conditions which had existed up till then. Not even the S.S. found it quite right to let women live like that. When wardresses discussed our camp between themselves they used to speak of “the horror of Birkenau”. One of the guards who had been a member of the Austrian Workers’ Militia, and had been posted compulsorily to the Waffen S.S., told me that he and several of his comrades could not touch their supper after a spell of sentry duty, because the memory of the things they had had to watch during the day made them sick.

CHAPTER FIVE

CAMP HOSPITAL

THE AUTHORITIES had planned the camp hospital of Birkenau on the basis of medical statistics in the Army, the Labour Service and similar organisations, where there was a maximum average of three sick per 100. Thus, a camp destined for 20,000 women was expected to have a sick roll of 600, and treatment-rooms, beds, sheets, blankets and medical supplies were calculated accordingly. But, at its best, Birkenau camp had never less than 2,000 in the hospital compound. The figure rose to 7,000 in times of epidemics; and epidemics raged in both the winters I was there. Then 7,000 patients had to share in supplies intended for 600. If we complained we were told that our average of medicaments per head was the same as that among the civilian population. In October, 1944, a new treatment room and a large, heatable waiting-room were built in Birkenau. In November we were transferred to another camp, and there the treatment-room was as small as the first one.

I had started late with my medical studies, and finished them only just before my arrest, so that I had never done any independent work as a doctor outside. Every physician knows the difficulties of one's first months after taking one's degree. Every young doctor will remember the shyness he felt before patients at the first diagnoses and prescriptions; but as a rule he began as an assistant in a hospital where he could ask an elder colleague's opinion in each complicated case. Imagine the situation of a doctor fresh from University who has to face a hundred patients, without advice or guidance, and to cope with diseases most of which are dangerous or mortal.

When I was posted to work in the camp hospital, in the "German" ward, I arrived with ideas taken from a normal clinic; I had some theoretical knowledge, which had grown slightly unreal during the preceding months in prison, but which I had learned fairly thoroughly. All this did not help. I knew all about the examination and auscultation of a patient, but in that noise I could not hear; in the dim light of the windowless rooms I could not see the patients in the lower bunks; I was incapable of giving injections from a precarious stance between two bunks of the third tier. In a word, for the time being I seemed to have no

ears to hear and no eyes to see. I envied my colleague, a doctor from Alsace, because of her stoic calm in walking from one sick woman to the next. She was a marvellous woman, big, serious, with the profile of a noble Roman matron, and she had ten years of medical practice behind her. I desperately begged her advice. I would implore her: "Please, Adelheid, tell me what's the matter with this woman. What shall I do with her?" Later my colleague told me that her calm had been purely external. She had disciplined herself not to frighten and discourage the patients, but she had walked round the hut just as desperate as I was, if perhaps a little less helpless, and felt all the time: "I am damned, I am walking through hell."

Anyone who realises the problems facing a doctor in such a situation—problems of which no one had dreamed outside the camp wire—will understand that the most conscientious among us were also those who failed most dismally in the beginning. At first I reproached myself, but then I saw that the same horror, the same feeling of helplessness, overcame nearly all my colleagues who had arrived recently, even doctors of great experience.

A kindly, clever old woman doctor once said to me: "I don't know, but it is my impression that here in the camp all illnesses develop differently and that practically everything we've learned outside is of no use to us here."

An additional difficulty was the incredible dirt, which was so bad that often one did not dare to touch a patient. It was impossible even to think of washing one's hands between examinations. At that time running water was being installed in the German ward—the first to get it—and off and on it actually ran for half an hour; but then we would again be without water for days except for the few pails fetched from the baths in the central office. The patients were as a rule given water for washing every three or four days; the intervals were longer if the nurse was lazy. But how could one speak of laziness when there was no sink, at the best a slop-pail, and the nurses had to take each basin to a ditch over 100 yards away to empty it? Very often a nurse had to look after fifty patients, in bad times as many as a hundred. The nurses had to fetch coffee, soup and tea in the morning, at midday and in the evening from a kitchen at the other end of the camp, in heavy cauldrons which four of them could scarcely carry.

I remember one particular day when there was not even water for dish-washing in the hut. The metal bowls, smeared with the cold blobs of yesterday's soup, were wiped with cellulose wads, then filled with fresh soup and distributed. But of course the women did not get the bowls they had used the day before. Among them were not only all the bedridden patients—with

typhus, paratyphoid, typhoid fever, erysipelas, open pulmonary tuberculosis—but also women with fresh injuries, women suffering from debility, and mothers with their newly born babies.

Yet this was the newest and best hut—so to speak, the hut for notables. It looked like all the others—a stable with a row of skylights, no windows, leaking walls—but it had a brick floor, and even boards under the beds, though one board was loose and gave if you trod on it, so that your foot would be ankle-deep in water. Another of its advantages was that behind the row of beds parallel with the wall there were no other beds squeezed in, and we could get to each patient without great difficulty. In other huts where I had to work later I came to feel a special horror of the back-row beds in which the women squatted as though in cages. Even if the German hut was the best off in bed-linen, many of its beds had but one sheet, which was washed only every six to eight weeks, regardless of a change of patients. In other huts there was usually no ground-sheet, only a blanket over the straw mattress, and never any top sheet. In the diarrhoea-room the women lay on the bare palliasses or on the boards. Even the straw mattresses were filled not with soft straw, but with wood fibre and shavings, which grew lumpy; often they were not much thicker than a thin eiderdown. If a patient died or was released from hospital neither sheet nor blankets were changed. The straw mattress was shaken out, the blankets smoothed, and the next sick woman was put into the bed. Patients suffering from one of the most dreaded camp diseases, known by the beautiful official term “treatment-resisting intestinal catarrh”, had liquid evacuation fifteen to twenty times a day, even when they were given large doses of opium. They, and the dying, often soiled their beds. The nurse would wipe the straw mattress and the blankets with a damp cloth or just with a cellulose swab, unless they were soaked through, and then the next victim would lie on them.

Mostly, two women shared a bed, and sometimes even three. In other huts we had as many as four patients in each of the lower bunks. It was not a rare occurrence for the over-loaded upper bunk—boards, straw mattress and inmates—to crash down on the women underneath, many of whom were gravely ill. But sometimes such an interlude was considered as a light relief. Many of the women were naked, since we had not enough night-dresses; they had to lie on the bare straw mattresses, whose sacking left its imprints on their skin. In the worst cases four women shared one or two thin horse-blankets—and that in winter, in an unheated hut.

After all this it is scarcely necessary to say that a patient who once entered the hut, perhaps with nothing worse than a septic

throat, would not leave until she had passed through most of the diseases assembled within the four walls. But the stamina of some women was incredible. Our Hut Senior, a good-looking prostitute, had been two years in Ravensbrück camp before coming to Auschwitz. Here she contracted, one after the other, exanthematic typhus and enteric typhoid fever, double pneumonia, pleurisy and slight tuberculosis (*apicitis specifica*); after that she became pregnant, contracted malaria in the fifth month, had a healthy boy after nine months, fell ill with a purulent mastitis—and when she left Auschwitz, after two years in the camp, she was still a beautiful girl. Whenever I think of her I remember the words of my Gestapo officer, who said: “Why shouldn’t you stay alive? It is possible to survive a concentration camp. . . .”

Not every woman had that girl’s iron constitution, and the deaths *en masse* which followed from the existing conditions seemed to disturb the S.S. just a little. Apparently it had not been part of the scheme—at least, not in the case of German women. Again and again the camp doctors received letters from unhappy parents who asked how it had been possible that their daughter, a strong young girl, could have died so soon after her arrival in the camp. Those inquiries were due not only to a complete ignorance of conditions in the camps, but also to the fact that, when the next of kin were informed of a death, the cause given was invariably far from the truth. Officially there was no such thing as typhus in the camp, and so nobody could die of typhus. Also, it would have been next to impossible to trace the exact cause of each death in a set-up in which women died not only in sick beds, but fell dead in the middle of a hut, in the road, or in a field.

The hospital office had five model reports which stated as the causes of death pneumonia, acute cardiac insufficiency, general physical debility, influenza, or intestinal disease. The formula was always: “Patient fell ill on the . . . Despite careful nursing and adequate treatment with medicaments, she expired on the . . .” In turn, one of the five versions would be attached to the official note informing the relatives of a death and sent off, whatever the actual cause of the death might have been. In this way, seventeen-year-old girls, up till then perfectly healthy, would suddenly be dead of “acute cardiac insufficiency, cause not traceable”. Women who had entered the camp a short time before weighing eleven stone would die of “general physical debility”. When the inquiries grew more frequent and insistent, we, the prisoner-doctors, were ordered to draw up individual, truthful reports about each death of a German patient. But as there was still no typhus in the camp, officially, most patients died of influenza—in those

reports. In the case of foreign prisoners, the authorities kept to the five stereotyped causes.

But this was not one of our greatest worries—neither the official lie nor the truth could wake any of the dead. We had become indifferent to the circumstances accompanying death. Too often it happened that a patient cried: "Please, do come and fetch this body from my bed. I've been lying with her for two hours now, and I'm getting so cold"—while she investigated the mattress to see if by any chance her dead bed-fellow had left her a parcel from home.

The girls of the special working party which had nothing to do but take away the dead—the *Leichenkommando*—were not strong enough to carry bodies. So they mostly dragged them along the floor to the stretcher. The men who came to fetch the corpses for the crematorium grasped them by their hands and feet and chucked them into a lorry. Where there was no consideration for the living, how should there have been respect for the dead? Only when one of our doctor colleagues died did we make a slight exception. We would put her on a stretcher and strew it with pine-branches. If she was a Pole, her country-women would pray at the bier. Sometimes we would sing. Then we would carry out the stretcher ourselves, in the evening, and gently lift it on to the lorry. The prisoner in charge of the lorry would read the number tattooed on her arm, and shout into the dark night: "Number 76723—all right?" That was all. In this way, I accompanied forty women doctors during my two years in Auschwitz. It was a great privilege of our profession that we were allowed "our own death", as Rilke called it, instead of ending like wild beasts.

If these were the conditions in our "good" German ward, it was worse in the other huts, and worst in the Jewish wards. In summer, when the hospital was less crowded, it was more bearable, because as a rule each patient would have a bed to herself. After my recovery from typhus in August, 1943, I started work in a Polish "convalescence" ward. We were four doctors for 300 patients then, with 275 beds. By November my three colleagues were down with typhus and I was alone. There were 750 patients. Everything drifted into my hut. It was originally meant for convalescents after serious illnesses, but there were also old women and chronic patients who would never leave hospital. There were women with T.B. whom I could not send to the tuberculosis station because it was overcrowded. There were patients with typhus and typhoid whom I could not send to the hut for infectious diseases because it, too, was overcrowded. They had sent me all the mothers with children under three, if either the

mother or the child was ill. In a corner was a boarded-up cubicle with seven beds for twenty-two lunatics, among them a raving maniac. Between ten and fifteen non-violent lunatics I had to keep in the hut itself. Some of them would insist on helping us. So it happened that one of the mad women got hold of a baby while the mother was delirious and could not guard the child, which shared her bed. The lunatic ran gaily through the hut with the child in her arms, while I shook with fear that she might hurl it on the floor. I should have been powerless to prevent it. Sometimes I looked round me in a daze. Was it possible that this was not just a dream?

At one time the last three bunks in my hut were an evil vision no painter could have rendered—Goya would have been too idyllic. In the lowest bunk was a lovely young Polish girl who suffered from a psychosis after typhus; she was intermittently sobbing and screaming. Beside her was the yellowish-grey face of a young girl suffering from pernicious anæmia and rapidly sinking. Her case was exceptionally tragic. She had had a child by a German who was a friend of her brother, and this was the reason she had been sent to the camp. Her father, by then dead, had been a Pole, her mother was a German; for some reason or other, the family signed the list of "German Nationals" only after the daughter's detention. Now her mother was registered as a German National, her brother as well as his friend—the father of her child—were serving in the German Army, legally her child had German nationality—and she was slowly dying in the camp as a Polish national. The case was so blatantly unjust that I raised it with the political section of the camp. They promised to send her a form on which she could sign as a "German National"; when the form arrived she was dead. In the bunk above her was a woman with typhus, in a state of coma. Her heart and circulation were still functioning, because she had been able to obtain sufficient stimulants through some friends, but cerebral complications had arisen. She was unconscious, her eyes protruded from their sockets, her lips were drawn away from her teeth, the jaws convulsively clamped. She evacuated ceaselessly and spread a dreadful stench. Beside her lay a Russian girl, a schizophrenic, who laughed and made grimaces. The heads of two girls looked down from the ledge of the top bunk: they had returned, sick with gonorrhœa, from a brothel installed by the camp, and their white-powdered faces with brightly painted lips, lit by the sky-lights, stood out like ghostly masks.

But in this hut the Poles also hid their most valued people, political workers, artists, aristocrats and old ladies whom they wanted to shelter from the rigours of the camp. It was considered a

privilege to spend the winter in the hospital hut instead of in the open camp. Though I was naturally prepared to cover this up in the face of the S.S., I often asked myself if we were really acting in the prisoners' interests. We had to keep a certain percentage of healthy people in the hut to help us with the nursing. For, despite the terrible waste of human labour in the camp, the authorities were absurdly economical in granting personnel to the hospital compound. Every complaint of ours that we were simply unable to cope with the work unless we had more helpers was countered with the argument that outside the camp there were far more patients per nurse than in the camp hospital. The argument disregarded the fact that outside a nurse turned on a hot-water tap to fill a bottle, while our nurses first had to "organise" fire for warming the water, then the water itself, and finally a vessel that could serve as a hot-water bottle. But if, in addition to the personnel, we kept a number of healthy women in the compound, we had so many beds less for sick people. Then, too, the healthy ones were even more exposed to infection inside a hospital hut than outside, although they had not to appear at roll calls and were sheltered from wind and rain. A lengthy stay in the hospital compound was in reality of help only to women who had passed through the whole range of infectious diseases—and those women were as a rule so weakened that they could hardly get up from their beds.

Constantly I was forced to dismiss women from hospital treatment who in any hospital outside would have been kept in bed, or at least treated as convalescents, for another three months; yet the hut became more and more overcrowded, until the work was beyond anybody's capacity. I must confess that many patients died before I even got round to examining them: while I started with the examination at one end of the hut, newly arrived patients died before I reached the other end. At that time I worked every day from eight in the morning to seven or eight at night. I had no day off; on Sundays, when I visited only the more serious cases, I never finished before three p.m. But the bad thing was not that we had so much work to do; after all, we worked voluntarily, we could have gone for a walk, for all the S.S. cared; nobody checked up whether we did our job or not. And those of us who were doctors had the tremendous advantage that we were allowed to give some help to our fellow-sufferers, instead of having to work in a munition factory. We were not torn away from our profession, we even saw a vast amount of often extremely interesting cases. But—what could we do?

Our resources were infinitely small. Serious clinical work was out of the question. Our diagnoses were crude and superficial.

The overtaxed laboratory could not deal with our requirements. It was impossible to make more finely differentiating diagnoses. And there was not much call for them either, with our scanty therapeutical possibilities. We could not have carried out major surgical operations in our compound. Among us there was a Jewish surgeon who was claimed by Berlin because of her specific professional training, and so had the unique chance of getting away from Auschwitz in spite of being Jewish; but she died before it was arranged. Later a Russian surgeon came—a large, good-looking, warm-hearted woman—but she did only lesser surgery. Within our compound we treated abscesses, phlegmones, and even fractures, but other operations had to be performed in the men's camp. Patients were taken there and sent back to us immediately after the operation, in a badly sprung ambulance driven along a road pitted with holes and ruts. They were put into one of the hospital huts I have described, into a bed quickly cleared so that they had it to themselves. And, under those conditions, most of the patients died. In the summer of 1944 the camp authorities at last decided to instal a small women's ward in the men's concentration camp, so that patients could stay there after the operation. This improvement was by no means due to a greater medical insight, but simply to the fact that the camp doctor in the men's camp wanted to get practice in gynæcological surgery, and so had an interest in keeping his women patients alive. (He was in great need of practice, for he was a very bad surgeon, and always asked the Jewish surgeon to tell him precisely which layer he had reached with his scalpel.) The male prisoners naturally did everything in their power to embellish the women's ward. There were white-enamelled beds, pink eiderdowns, pillows, clean linen—in short, it was a little island of the blessed. The men provided the women with good meals, so that they returned to our camp rested and recuperated.

After a few months the happiness was over. The ward was cleared of our patients and no further cases for operation were admitted. Instead, it was reserved for operations on pregnant Jewish women from Hungary: an abortion was carried out on each of them, whatever her stage of pregnancy, and then they were sent to work in a munition factory. Later the ward proved too small for the purpose, and the abortions were carried out in the gynæcological station which in the meantime had been set up in our compound. I asked one of my colleagues—a deeply religious Polish woman who worked there together with two Jewish women surgeons—how she could bring herself thus to operate on healthy women. She said that those women themselves begged to be relieved of their unborn children, and that the only

way to save the mothers from death in the gas-chamber was to sacrifice the children. Indeed, this treatment was lenient compared with the earlier procedure, when nearly all pregnant Jewish women were gassed. If one of them happened to give birth in the camp, the child was immediately drowned. I remember coming upon a Dutch woman weeping desperately in the hospital garden. She was in an advanced stage of pregnancy; as she was half Jewish, she was left alive in the camp; but, since her husband was a Jew, the child would be considered Jewish, and she had been told that it would be killed. In this knowledge she waited for her labour to come.

Yet, it was even more frightful to see nursing mothers kill their three- or four-month-old babies, by choking them or giving them twenty sleeping tablets, so as not to be sent to the gas chamber with the child. Many of those women had elder children hidden outside in the care of non-Jews, and wanted to keep alive for their sake.

The sickness which claimed the greatest number of victims was typhus. We called it the "camp disease". In Auschwitz there were only two classes of women: those who had got over typhus and those who had this prospect still before them. There were no women who did not get it until spring, 1944, when the lice had been got rid of. When I started my work in the German hut in February, 1943, fourteen other women were posted there as nurses, cleaners and clerks. On the second day the first of them had to go to bed with a temperature of 102° F. The day after the fever rose to 105° F., by the evening she was blue in the face with cyanosis, and that night she died. Every day one or two of the staff fell ill, so that any systematic work became impossible. They fell right and left, like blades of grass before the scythe.

The bodies of those who died during the night were put outside the hut; next morning we would find them dreadfully mutilated by rats. During the epidemic of the following winter of 1943-4, when there were as many as 350 deaths per day, it was impossible even during the day to take them into the utterly inadequate mortuary. The corpses were piled up, four and five layers deep, along the whole length of the infectious hut. In the evening the lorry would come to fetch them. Later the wall of bodies was put alongside of another hut, not because the disease claimed fewer victims in the infectious hut, but because the S.S. man who drove the lorry had an affair with a girl transferred to the second hut, and he wanted to make it easier to be with his girl while the corpses were being loaded.

During the first winter of my stay in Auschwitz the mortality rate of typhus was eighty per hundred patients; in the second

winter it was slightly lower. Two things were needed to treat this illness: good nursing and cardiac stimulant. It was illusory to think of the former, and the medicaments were tragically insufficient. I used to organise my visits as follows: I had a list of patients with typhus, and while I went from one to the other, I put one, two or three exclamation marks after each one's name. In the afternoon I got my supply of medicaments, and had to calculate how many injections of stimulants I should be able to give. As a rule there was only just enough for those with three exclamation marks, on rare occasions those with two marks got something, and the patients with one exclamation mark were given an injection only when they or their friends managed to get a private supply of stimulants. Before the sixth day of the illness I gave nothing at all to those patients whose heart was healthy to begin with.

I had to think it out. There was a patient in the crisis, gravely ill, that is to say, on the eleventh or twelfth day of the illness, shortly before the fever subsided. Her pulse was hardly perceptible. To pull her through I should need at least 6 or 8 c.c. of camphor. But if I gave it to her, and she died, taking the precious camphor into the grave, I should reproach myself—I should have given 3 or 4 c.c. to two of the less serious cases whose state was growing worse because I had nothing left for them. And yet could I let the sick woman die, unhelped, while there was a chance to save her? The two others might survive without the stimulant. . . . Or here was a mother of many children—there a girl radiant with youth, her whole life still before her. Which one should I help?

Once you realised that the decision over life or death was in your hands, the responsibility crushed you. You had to pass through all this like a sleep-walker, and yet try, somehow, to arrange things so that you could justify it before your conscience.

Officially there was no typhus in Auschwitz camp. . . . When the first cases were discovered and reported the S.S. hit upon a drastic method: the sick were killed by intravenous injections of benzine, "to prevent the infection from spreading". Quite apart from everything else, this was sheer madness, because it took three to four days before typhus could be diagnosed with any certainty (this period was later reduced by the introduction of the dried-blood test). During those days innumerable lice on the patient's body became infected, so that the killing of young, strong women with sound hearts, who might have been saved, did nothing to limit the spreading of the disease. The result was that we, the prisoner-doctors, simply disguised typhus as "influenza" in our lists.

When I arrived at the camp one of the S.S. men, Rotten-

führer Klaus, recommended typhus patients to my special care. Those people knew, of course, that the prisoner-doctors kept typhus cases secret, but it would have been difficult to prove this, among such a multitude of patients. The camp doctor at that time—Dr. Kitt—could have found out, but he was afraid to. On the one hand he knew perfectly well that the “benzine treatment” did not halt the epidemic—he seemed not to approve of it—and on the other hand he feared that higher quarters would blame him, as the man responsible for hygiene in the camp, because he had failed to stamp out the epidemic. Therefore he preferred to accept our “influenza” cases at their face value.

It is doubtful whether we were right in our attitude. By not reporting typhus we relieved the S.S. of the obligation to take energetic measures against the epidemic.

I was still fumbling for a way out when I myself contracted typhus. After my convalescence the situation was different. We had a new camp doctor—Dr. Rohde, from Marburg-on-the-Lahn, one of those kindly, muddle-headed people of whom it seems impossible to understand why and how they could have volunteered for the S.S. He was so popular with the prisoners that a young Jewish nurse whose life he had saved went so far as to say: “I would protect him even if it costs my own life.” But—he, too, was S.S. Camp Doctor at Auschwitz. . . .

When the special Jewish sick hut proved insufficient, he took the Jewish patients into the hospital compound and put them together with the other patients; he reorganised the huts in surgical, internal and infectious wards, while previously they had been organised according to nationalities, and generally tried to proceed reasonably. In that summer of 1943 things seemed to improve, the infectious diseases declined. And yet . . . in October, 1943, there were officially twenty cases of typhus on the sick list—Jewish and non-Jewish women, but no Germans. One day they were all taken away: they never came back. They were killed. The man under whose regime we had begun to breathe more freely had not prevented their murder, just as he had not the courage later on to refuse his co-operation in selections for the gas chamber. We at once stopped reporting further typhus cases, with Dr. Rohde’s silent connivance. He feared himself that he might get another order to commit murder, and he was grateful to us, the prisoner-doctors, when we pretended to believe that he knew nothing of the new outbreak of a typhus epidemic.

In fact, typhus was only stamped out when Hauptsturmführer Dr. Mengele, the ruthless cynic, became camp doctor. He collected the 1,500 worst cases among the Jewish patients in a hospital hut and sent them to the gas chamber. Thus he obtained an

empty hut, which was disinfected and supplied with new paliasses and clean blankets. Then the patients of the nearest hut were de-loused, examined and taken naked into the vermin-free hut, which was put out of bounds. The same with the next hut, and so on, until everything was clean. Given the circumstances, this was the correct way of fighting and overcoming the epidemic. But that the camp authorities did not think it necessary to build a new hut for the purpose, that the cleaning-up began with the murder of 1,500 Jewish women—that was part of the horror of a situation in which everything was perverted from its meaning, in which evil was good and good evil.

Ninety-nine per cent. of the prisoners had a typhus attack between the third and tenth week of their stay in the camp. In the autumn of 1943 the total of women prisoners in Birkenau-Auschwitz was 32,000, of whom 7,000 were in hospital, as a constant figure. In the months from October, 1943, to February, 1944, the average number of deaths was between 100 and 150 per day. Despite the steady trickle of new-comers from outside, the total figure of prisoners fell within two months to 24,000. The only group among the prisoners of which a considerable number never went down with typhus was the Russian group. Many of them had passed through the illness when they were young children, others had only a light attack. I had many Russian patients. When they had a high temperature they would pull the blanket over their heads and refuse treatment by the doctor. After a fortnight they would emerge and ask to be released from hospital. It was rare for them to suffer from complications.

When I was in charge of the convalescent hut practically all those convalescing from grave illnesses were under me for a fortnight to four weeks to "recover". In the course of my work I acquired so much practice in the auscultation of hearts that I could say at once whether the patient had had typhus or not. Only with the Russian women did I often make mistakes: their heart-beats sounded as if they had had no more than a running cold. With people from most of the other national groups it was safe to assume that it took them from two to three months to get fit for work—if they ever got fit again. Their resistance was lowered to a point where they were extremely susceptible to other illnesses. With them typhus rarely passed without simultaneous or subsequent complications. Nearly all the patients had one or more of the following very serious illnesses: otitis media (inflammation of the middle ear), parotitis (inflammation of the auricular glands), pneumonia, pleurisy, abscesses, phlegmones, temporary or permanent psychoses of a toxic kind, and above all debility of heart and circulation.

We continually met fantastic diseases which a doctor hardly ever sees in normal conditions, such as gangrenous ulcer of the cheek (noma) or pampbigus, when the skin lifts away from the muscles in big blisters which burst, leaving the flesh bare in large patches, and the patient dies within a few days. Then there were other infectious diseases, and, in the case of a very large percentage of patients, tuberculosis, which developed rapidly and deserved the old name of "galloping" consumption. Towards the summer the typhus cases grew less, but the number of malaria cases increased. There was scarcely any quinine available for their treatment, and not enough neo-salvarsan; occasionally we could give them atebine. The women, left for weeks without treatment, turned white as a sheet and so weak that their legs would not carry them.

Another symptom following on typhus, because of the toxic injuries to vessels and the insufficiency of the blood circulation, was an outbreak of œdema which bloated the body in a way never observed outside the camp. Œdema of a similar type also occurred without a previous infectious disease, merely following on under-nourishment. Heart and kidneys functioned normally, but the whole body swelled, the eyelids swelled so much that the patients were unable to open their eyes, breasts and the tissue of the abdomen were like soft paste, and the legs turned into shapeless columns up to the hips. I saw cases in which the œdema became so bad that the skin could not stand the tension and burst, leaving deep gashes from which the liquid poured out. We had no gauze bandages, but only bandages of paper tissue, and not enough of them either. When those bandages were not changed often enough—which happened frequently because of the shortage—the open wounds stayed covered with a dirty, doughy layer of paper. A secondary infection was almost inevitable, all the more so as the open gashes showed no progress in closing. We attempted to fight œdema by cardiacs and diuretics (medicaments stimulating the discharge of urine), dextro-glucose, calcium and vitamins—as far as they were available! The treatment had, of course, a chance of success only if it was combined with strengthening nourishment. Most of the œdema patients contracted chronic diarrhœa—a liquid evacuation, a sort of œdema in the intestine—and died of general cardiac and circulatory insufficiency.

After the infectious hut, the diarrhœa hut had the highest mortality rate. We were never certain of the cause of this sort of diarrhœa. It occurred in connection with typhus, paratyphoid and dysentery, but as a rule no pathogenic bacteria of the intestine were found at an analysis of the fæces: post-mortem dissections showed only a slight swelling and inflammatory reddening of the

mucous membranes of the intestine. In reality all the inmates of the camp suffered from more or less serious disturbances of the intestinal tract. Some of the women were put to bed in the hospital in the very first days after their arrival in camp, suffering from diarrhoea; they would not respond to treatment whatever we did, and only a minority pulled through. We tried leaving them without food, except toasted bread and dried mashed potatoes, and treating them with carbon, tannalbin, opiates, sulphonamides, but they grew weaker and weaker, and died after a few months from general debility, if they did not contract an infectious disease at an earlier stage. The Dutch Jewesses especially were highly sensitive to this illness and succumbed to it; of some of their transports not a single one survived. I lost by this intestinal catarrh many patients whom I had laboriously got through typhus.

Skin diseases were not quite so dangerous, but terrible for the victims, which meant at times the whole camp. At one stage, 75 per cent. of the patients and many healthy prisoners as well suffered from scabies. Of mitigal and other ointments there was just as much as a population of 20,000 would use in normal conditions—that is to say, nothing compared with our needs. We could not give those women treatment. In the case of emaciated, cachectic patients I often did not know how to make an injection into a muscle, because I hit bone directly under the skin, I could not find a single clean piece of skin on the bodies of those poor women, and did not know where to insert the hypodermic needle.

Dr. Klein, later of Belsen, often told us that the S.S. would have preferred it if the "Aryan" prisoners had remained healthy and fit for work. This is quite plausible, especially at the later stage, when the slave trade for the munition factories was in full swing. But, on the other hand, the S.S. did not see, or rather refused to see, that it was impossible to stay healthy in the conditions of a camp; consequently they blamed us, the doctors, for the illnesses. In autumn, 1944, the special camp for gypsies near our camp was liquidated. There whole families with numerous small children had lived in even greater squalor than our prisoners, though this hardly seems possible. The S.S. picked out the few prisoners who were still fit for work and sent them into ordnance factories. The rest, about 4,000, were sent on transport. But afterwards the doctors of the gypsy camp were put into punishment companies, because they had looked after the prisoners' health so badly that the authorities had "unfortunately" been forced to have them gassed!

It is an intrinsic part of the picture that many S.S. men, above all the camp doctors, had no illusions about the insupportable

character of those conditions. Characteristically, Dr. Mengele addressed a gathering of all the prisoner-doctors in May, 1944, when the worst of it was over for the time being: "Ladies, now we've created conditions in our hospital compound which might be called *relatively* bearable. . . ." This "relatively bearable" state of affairs still included windowless stables as wards for tubercular women, two years after the organisation of the compound. Yet it was true to say that during the preceding two years conditions had not been relatively, but absolutely, unbearable.

CHAPTER SIX

THE INFERNO

AFTER MY first six months in the concentration camp I thought I had a fairly comprehensive idea of everything going on there. I imagined I had shared, or at least had seen, all the misery and horror there could be. I was wrong. It had been the merest prelude.

From the first days in the camp I was familiar with the terms "the gas", or "gone through the chimney", or, as a euphemism "gone on transport". I knew that four crematoria existed in the pinewoods round Birkenau camp. I knew that not only the bodies of those who had died a "natural" death in camp were burnt there, but that they also contained the infamous gas-chambers where living beings were gassed to death, in peak periods even burnt while they were lying unconscious after the gassing. I no longer knew it from vague reports of a few comparatively well-informed people who told of things happening somewhere at the back of beyond in Poland: I was there, on the spot, it happened a few hundred yards away; and everybody who had been in the camp for some time could give me authentic information. Not only that; at the very first roll call I had seen Labour Service Leader Stiebitz selecting physically weak Jewish women "for transport"—and yet I still felt it could not be true. It seemed too fantastic, too crazy, too unthinkable to me. This feeling of mine was supported by the fact that shortly after my arrival in the camp the gassing had stopped, for the time being, and no large-scale operations of this sort had occurred during all the weeks before I fell ill with typhus. I was already inclined to dismiss the tales of the gas-chambers as ugly legends. During my illness and immediately afterwards I did not know what was happening around me, and for quite a long time everything outside seemed to be veiled in mist. Then, one August night in 1943, came the knowledge.

The day had been torrid. The sun had scorched the roof felting of the hospital huts, and the heat inside was unbearable. Through the wide-open doors of my hut we could see the road which led from the railway station to the crematorium, past the camp. From the other end of the hut we could see across the roofs of more huts to where the slender chimney of the crematorium was sharply out-

lined in the luminous summer sky. The heat and the fleas made sleep impossible. Suddenly I heard in the distance loud shrieks and shouts from a hundred throats. The noise came nearer, then it dwindled, then it ceased. After a few minutes it approached again, from the same side, and died down in the other direction. A third time, a fourth time. I could not stay in bed. I got up and went to the door.

I saw one open lorry after the other driving towards the camp from the station. Each was crammed to bursting point with people—as far as I could make out, women and children—stretching their arms to the sky. I walked through the hut to the other door, and saw the lorries disappear in the direction of the crematorium. I stared after them and began to understand. "It's starting again!" said the woman on guard at the door.

Scarcely fifteen minutes later the chimney began to belch thick clouds of a black, sweetish-smelling smoke which bellied across the camp. A bright, sharp flame shot up, six feet high. Soon the stench of burnt fat and hair grew unbearable. And still the lorries drove past, on the same route. We counted sixty batches that night. The last was an ambulance car which carried the Red Cross on roof and sides as though in mockery.

I stood there, leaning against the door-jamb, and my brain refused to function. Now I knew that it was true. It was true that they were committing direct, shameless mass murder. I could not breathe. I felt that I wanted to scream, to run there, to throttle the men who did it, to throw myself in front of the wheels—but I only stood there in the radiant summer night, motionless, helpless, and mumbled: "How can this ever be expiated?" Soon after the last car had disappeared the first lorries came back laden with the luggage and clothes of the dead, which they took to the depot. It was over. But the chimney smoked all the following day.

Later I worked out why I had noticed nothing during my first six months in the camp. The whole previous autumn and winter transports like those I saw in August, 1943, had been taken directly from the station to the gas chamber, without discrimination. A few times high S.S. officers had gone to the station and claimed persons who belonged to one or other profession then needed in the camp. The medical and sanitary personnel were usually kept alive. Towards the end of the winter several entire transports had been taken into the camp; they were used to increase the number of prisoners. For at that time new huts had been set up, new subsidiary camps opened, labour was needed for the spring sowing on the large estate which was administered by the camps and fed the prisoners as well as the S.S. garrison. Now, by August, they had sufficient man-power for the harvesting; also,

the mortality rate of the camp was considerably lower in the summer than in winter-time, so that the number of the prisoners could be kept at its level with the help of non-Jewish arrivals. Fresh Jewish transports were gassed. A few weeks later, when the crops were in, the number of prisoners was radically reduced by the same methods, so that there should be fewer people to feed through the winter.

After that beginning I saw countless transports pass along the same road, and—it is difficult to put this into words—all of us grew accustomed to it. In the spring of 1944, after the occupation of Hungary by the German troops, a new peak was reached. In April our camp senior, Heinrich Schuster—a shady man who was on friendly terms with the S.S.—told me that they were expecting the arrival of 800,000 Hungarian Jews in Auschwitz for the coming month. When I asked him what they meant to do with them, he shrugged his shoulders. Then he explained that the Commandant, von Hartenstein, an Austrian, and a relatively decent individual to whom at least a few women owed their release from the camp, had applied for his transfer. Apparently he wished to have no personal part in what was to come. The man who took his place was Josef Kramer, whom the world knows as the Beast of Belsen, and who in the years before had carried through the mass liquidation of Slovak and Polish Jews in Auschwitz. He was made commandant of all the camps at Auschwitz.

The first time I saw Kramer, he was standing in the camp road and, like a street urchin, throwing stones at two young nurses who had angered him. The story ran that they had put out their tongues at him, but though it is not quite impossible I do not believe it. Fortunately they were separated from him by the wire netting round the hospital compound. Afterwards he came to the hospital, ordered a roll-call of the whole staff, and ran up and down our ranks like a madman. Then he stopped, hitting his boots with his dog-whip: an enormously bulky man, his bull-neck lowered, his thick head and jowls purple with rage. I had plenty of time to get a good look at him. Yes, this was what they looked like, those hangmen and slaughterers—like the creatures of a diseased imagination, as though invented by a “bad, because exaggerated” enemy propaganda. If something like evil incarnate were to exist in this world, it would have to look like that man.

And he had been sent to deal with hundreds of thousands of Jews from Hungary due at Auschwitz. He did the job.

At the end of April they laid a railway track from Auschwitz station to the camp. In the beginning of May one goods train after the other passed the camp and stopped at the gate. One or

two of the trucks were loaded with luggage, all the others with human beings, human beings, human beings.

At that period it was an institution in the hospital compound that our orchestra, which consisted of excellent artists (until her tragic death from meningitis, the great Austrian violinist Alma Rosée was its conductor), gave a little concert twice a week for patients able to be up and for the staff. It took place on a circular lawn, a little island in the desert of mud and dust. We nicknamed those concerts "sound-wave therapeutics", because they were organised while there was lack of medicaments and other means of medical treatment. But it made at least for a little variety; and when we walked round the lawn in our white overalls or our neatest summer frocks we could pretend, with a certain effort of the imagination, that it was a bit like a concert at a spa. The band used to play light music, the time-honoured comical hits of the old Austrian music-hall star Leopoldi delighted the hearers, and we sometimes managed to laugh and joke. Then the cattle-trucks, their doors open, would roll past the wire, the people in them would look down at us, some perhaps comforted by the relatively normal, gay picture we offered. They would wave to us, we would look at them—and we knew that the vast majority of those we saw would not be alive in a few hours' time. That we went on playing music, that we never shouted to them "Jump out—run—resist," is something I cannot understand to this day.

We often spoke about it. How was it possible for us to be so calm, how was it possible for them to be so calm? They came from a country which, until a few months before, had been so far at liberty that they must have had access to news known to the international public. In spite of this they knew nothing of what they had to expect—otherwise they could not have gone like sheep to the slaughter, without resistance, without protest. But if people outside did not know, how could the German people know it? While I was still free, I had switched on to the B.B.C. three times a day. Once I had heard a brief speech by Thomas Mann, on the occasion of a report that fifty Dutch Jews had been killed near Lublin for experimental purposes. Fifty! Until my arrest on October 13th, 1942, I had heard nothing in the broadcasts about the mass murder which had gone on in Auschwitz, Maidanek, Treblinka, and so on, ever since 1939. When I saw those Hungarian transports I had to assume that it was not generally known in the outside world as late as 1944.

Certainly, the rumours, the incomplete stories, or even mere hints should have been enough to prevent the German people from taking refuge in ignorance. Every single one should have demanded to be told about the things that happened here. A whole

nation has not the right "not to know" that a million humans are being killed in its midst. But I also want to recall the incredible lack of knowledge or awareness outside the German frontiers, precisely because it is so difficult to account for it.

The ignorance of the doomed people themselves made it possible to use relatively small S.S. units during their journey to the slaughter-house. In my whole time in the camp I did not hear shooting or any other symptom of resistance more than three or four times. I was told that once a Jewish woman from Italy had pulled the revolver out of an S.S. man's belt and shot him with it, and a few times people tried to escape.

Once an S.S. man told us about one of those attempts. At that time they used to light enormous bonfires near the crematorium, allegedly to burn the dirty, useless clothing of gassed people, for which there was no room in the ovens. Reliable friends from another camp, built nearer than ours to one of the crematoria, have told me that they saw with their own eyes how babies torn from their mothers' arms were thrown directly into those fires, without the detour through a gas-chamber. I did not see it myself; but I must believe it, after all that happened.

One night a transport arrived in which people knew, or at least guessed, what was coming. There were shouts, shooting, and a group tried to break out. The S.S. man who told us about it had been ordered to search the undergrowth for escaped prisoners. I will try to render the words in which he told his story to another doctor, myself, and a few girls, some of whom were Jewish: "It was dark and rather cold, and I thought I'd got the whole bunch and could go home at last. Then I saw two children squatting under a shrub. They were two boys, brothers, about four and seven years old. I said to them, 'Come along, kids, it's much too cold here; over there's a beautiful big fire, and I'll take you there.' The bigger one smelt a rat, and said he wanted to stay where he was. But the little one started crying and pestering his big brother. He said, 'Come, let's go with the uncle to the big fire.' So the seven-year-old gave in; the kid didn't like it under the damp branches himself. They took me by the hand, and I brought them both back without having to use force."

When the S.S. man ended, it was so still in the room that you could have heard a leaf drop. He looked round the circle with the smug expression of a man who has handled a difficult, delicate task with great tact and expects due praise. But when he saw our frozen faces, his own face grew uncertain and a little embarrassed, as if it were beginning to dawn on him that he should not be too certain of our applause.

The people coming with a transport from Hungary left the

trucks in front of the camp gates, where a group of S.S. men and the camp doctor waited for them. There they were divided into two groups. On one side were those over fifty and under fourteen and all those who looked sickly, on the other side the rest. The first group was sent straight to the gas-chamber. The others stayed in the camp or were sent on to war work in one of the munition factories. Of our various camp doctors, Dr. Koenig repeatedly declared that this duty at the railway track was a torture for him, and he had to drink a lot of alcohol to stick it out. Dr. Mengele, on the other hand, whistled and pointed his thumb to one or the other group. We could never find out how many of the new-comers were ranged in either group. Even an estimate was difficult, because it was not always certain whether a loaded truck was really going to a munition plant or to a crematorium. But there is one thing I can say as a witness: from the 4th or 5th of May till the end of July, 1944, the four crematoria round our camp were burning day and night, without a pause, and the six-feet-high flames shot up from each of the four chimneys continually. Thus did Josef Kramer liquidate the Hungarian Jews.

Yet, taken as a group, the Hungarian Jews were still "lucky", in that they arrived at a time when Germany needed new soldiers and hardly any but foreign workers were employed in the war factories. This fact saved the physically stronger ones among them, as their detention did not last more than a year. Of the Jews from other countries who had arrived in the camps in the preceding years, only a negligible percentage survived. In our camp approximately 99 per cent. of the Jewish women from France, Holland, Greece and Germany died of illness. The mortality rate was somewhat lower among those from Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Poland.

It is worth while to mention an instance which illustrates the grotesque contradictions inherent in the whole hellish system. For a Jew there were only two possibilities of certain escape from the gas chamber: he had either to have stolen silver spoons, or to have worked in an underground movement. Jews who were common criminals or political offenders were arrested, listed in the files, and given a dossier somewhere in the judiciary apparatus. Therefore they could not be simply exterminated, while those who had done nothing and were promised re-settlement in Poland escaped the gas only by the merest chance, if they did escape it. I knew some Jewish women Communists, most of them from Czechoslovakia, who were implicated in important political trials, had been sentenced to ten and fifteen years' imprisonment, and probably owed their lives to this fact. Instead of being sent to the penitentiary, they came to our camp—the "extermination

camp", as it was called semi-officially—but they were put to work in the hospital and, comparatively speaking, did not fare too badly.

To the last day in camp I was unable to make up my mind whether this peculiarity was exclusively the result of bureaucratic rules, or whether the idea behind it was that those women might be needed in fresh political trials, as witnesses, or to be confronted with the accused. The "filed" Jewish women, as they were termed, were always spared during selections for the gas-chamber. Even if their numbers had been listed for gassing, they were struck off at the last moment—preferential treatment which otherwise was shown only to doctors and nursing staff.

What such a "selection" meant, I learnt for the first time some weeks after the night in which the crematoria had resumed their work. The harvest was nearly over; during the winter they had no intention of feeding more than the "necessary minimum" of prisoners. I was then working in the "Polish" hut, in which, however, thirteen patients were actually Jewish. One morning a medical N.C.O., about twenty-two years old, who acted as an assistant to the camp doctor, came unexpectedly into the hut and asked the clerk to call up the Jewish patients. At first I did not understand what he meant, but one of the nurses whispered: "Selection!" The thirteen women had to stand in line in the middle of the hut, and take off their night-dresses. They were standing in front of the young man, who looked from one to the other, a little embarrassed and vacillating, and pulled at his nose. There was dead silence in the hut. I stood behind him with clenched fists and thought only: "If he takes one of them, I'll jump at his throat." I do not know what I really should have done; but if there is such a thing as suggestion, it may well have occurred then and there. The young S.S. man could not come to a decision. In the end he asked the clerk if these were all the Jewesses in the hut. She was scared, and said that there was still a young girl. My heart stood still. Miriam Weiss, the daughter of a post-master from Vinkovce in Croatia, was a charming young thing who had just passed through typhus and, like all convalescents after this illness, looked like a ghost, a bundle of skin and bones. She and her mother—a good, gentle woman—worked as cleaners in the hospital. Since she belonged to the staff, the clerk had not mentioned her name. Now, lacking the courage to protect her, she called out in a trembling voice: "Frau Weiss, bring your child here!" And the mother came, leading her nineteen-year-old daughter, who could scarcely stand on her feet, to join the other women. I thought of Abraham leading Isaac to the sacrificial altar.

It seemed almost certain that the medical N.C.O. would put her number on the gas-chamber list, as she looked so obviously weak and unfit. In a last desperate attempt, I said that the girl was a nurse. Since she was really a cleaner, the protection from "selection" which the camp doctor had obtained for his hospital staff did not cover her case. But I would have told worse lies in that moment. My statement had its effect. The N.C.O. looked round the room, shrugged, and left the hut without noting down a single woman. When he had gone the girl's mother fainted. Eight months later I saw the girl again. She and her mother had managed to wangle good jobs through compatriots working in the man-power office, and she had been able to get decent, ample food: she was strong, and it was good to look at her.

Later I had to transfer the thirteen Jewish patients into a Jewish hospital ward, and treated exclusively "Aryan" patients, so that I was never present at another "selection" among my sick women. In other huts, with more Jewish patients, selections used to end differently from the exceptional case I had witnessed. As a rule, the camp doctor went to the huts himself, sometimes accompanied by the Commandant and the Head Wardress; these S.S. officials alone classified the women. I stress this fact, because the prisoner-patients might well have had a different, and erroneous impression: the camp doctor was nearly always escorted by a few prisoners—that is to say, the Chief Doctor, the two camp seniors, and a girl from the office who had to take down the numbers of the selected patients. It looked as if a mixed commission consisting of S.S. and prisoners—mostly Germans—had come to decide on the fate of the sick women. In reality, it was the S.S. doctor who acted, while the prisoners had to stand by, passive and powerless.

The camp doctor would line up all the Jewish patients on one side of the heating-bench and make them walk past him, stark naked, to the other side. All those who were too ill to get out of bed were lost from the outset. Anyone who was agile enough to leap over the heating-bench in an unguarded moment, and so to avoid walking past the doctor, was saved. And a man calling himself a physician stood there and gathered in the harvest of death.

The rest of the prisoners did everything in their power to obstruct the doctor and to save one or other of the victims; I do not think that a single one among us withheld her help. We would hide women somewhere in the hut—the S.S. would order the names to be called out from the index cards in the hospital file. We would smuggle them into "Aryan" huts, or into huts where the selection had already taken place—they would check up a

second time in all those huts. We would put their names on the list of patients due for release from the hospital and send their index cards to the office which handled the release formalities—they would prohibit any releases from the compound on selection days. It was a cat-and-mouse game with human lives.

The camp doctor, Dr. Thilo, one of the worst criminals among the S.S. doctors, once tried a new system. He reviewed the patients and noted a few of their numbers, without a word. Then he said: "Well, here is the list of the ones to stay in camp, all the others go on transport." This meant that all the women whom we had hidden, among them many who were perfectly healthy, were automatically selected for the gassing. It was only with great difficulty that he was persuaded to revise his decision on the following day—then he put the healthy women on the list of those who could stay in the camp.

Another camp doctor—the cynical Dr. Mengele—made things easy for himself. He ordered us, the prisoner-doctors, to write out meticulous lists of our patients, complete with diagnoses and prognoses. We were to state an approximate date by which the patient would be fit for release from the hospital and for resumption of work. It was difficult to refuse writing such a list, as we were told nothing about its purpose, although we guessed it only too well. If we put down that a patient had to remain in the hospital for over three or four weeks, she was condemned. If we put down a shorter term, the doctor would send for the patient and shout at us: "What! you say you're a doctor, and you mean to send this half-dead, wretched creature out of hospital in under four weeks?" This made it look as if we were ruthlessly cheating the patients of their due time for recovery. Or, if Dr. Mengele accepted the short-term prognosis, he would insist on the release of the patient at the stated date; in the case of those enfeebled women, a release was sometimes nothing short of murder. It was often impossible to find a way out.

Some Jewish women showed an unbelievable vitality. I remember a cold winter day, when another selection was due and we were sitting in our hut with hag-ridden faces. The huts were under the strictest discipline, and nobody was permitted to go out. Then we heard an agitated knocking on our door: a naked woman stood there in the snow and begged us to hide her inside. Our Hut Senior—she would have been punished and degraded had the woman been found in the hut during an inspection—did not dare to take the risk, and sent her away. I saw the woman next day. She told me that she had thrown herself on a heap of corpses next to our hut and pulled one of the bodies over her, as a cover. Thus she had stayed four or five hours, till the selection was over.

This was one of the women who went under fear of extermination because they were "unfit for life".

Occasionally Jewish women were hidden by the camp "authorities" themselves. We had a wardress—Frau Drechsler, a former secondary school teacher from Košice, and one of the most nauseating and ruthless among the S.S. women. She liked to take an active part in selections. Despite her professional anti-Semitism, she used mostly Jewish girls in her team of "runners"—prisoners who served instead of a telephone system and carried her orders quickly to the various posts of the camp—because they were good at languages. One of those girls, just recovering from typhus, was suddenly transferred to my purely "Aryan" hut, on the express orders of Wardress Drechsler. The next day Wardress Drechsler took part in a selection in the very same hut from which the Jewish girl had come to us. In other words, the wardress had hidden the girl from her own selection, clearly because she lacked the courage to protect her in the presence of other S.S. officers. She wanted to keep her as a runner because she was useful, but we had to bear the risk. For if the girl had been discovered in our hut during a selection, the wardress would have been able to deny that she had ever given such an order.

Altogether, the contradictions in the conduct of the S.S. officers bordered on lunacy. One camp doctor set up a Jewish hospital hut, obtained adequate medical supplies for it, and personally looked after its inmates. Thus, Dr. Koenig's special interest was attracted by the case of a Jewish woman who suffered from noma, the gangrenous ulcer of the cheek. He gave orders that she should be treated with large quantities of sulphonamides and vitamins, and visited her every day. A week later he sent her to the gas-chamber. Dr. Thilo had a favourite among the gypsies, who suffered the same fate as the Jews; he brought the patient meat and tomatoes with his own hands—and sent him personally to the gas-chamber. Indeed, it seems futile to try to understand those mental processes otherwise than by comparing them with the split consciousness of schizophrenics. But camp conditions corrupted even prisoners, until they came close to speaking like an S.S. man. A non-Jewish prisoner, brutal but cool-headed, once exclaimed: "Don't go on giving medicines to the Jews. It's not that I've got anything against them—so far as I'm concerned, they can all get well. But it's sheer nonsense to give them all those things if they're going to be gassed anyway, and let our people die for lack of medicine!"

At the end of a selection the camp numbers of all selected women were put on lists. The following days were filled with a hectic haggling. Whoever had a friend or relative on the list tried

to pull every possible string; whoever had any sort of influence with the higher S.S. officers secretly attempted to save one or the other of the doomed women. If it was at all plausible, some period of medical study would be claimed—for in this one point they observed the Geneva Convention, which protects members of the medical profession in war-time. Again and again the camp doctor would be made to revise his sentence—in a few cases. But the suffering of those women, even if they were rescued in the end, is beyond imagination.

It was neither just nor fair that some women stayed alive, only because they had certain contacts, while the others were left to die. And yet it was better to have saved a few than none. Slowly, we all grew blunted and saw the mass murder of Jews as something which was horrifying but immutable. Then, when the list contained a name which was familiar, which meant more than a camp number, which stood out from the multitude of nameless victims, we would feel: "This cannot be, this must not be, it must somehow be possible to save this one human being."

In the autumn of 1943 I met a Frau Traubkatz who told me that she was a sister of the writer Lion Feuchtwanger, and asked me to give her love to her brother should I survive the camp and she not. I liked to talk with her and often did. She was one of the few German Jews who conserved their will to live, even in the camp; most of the others came with something like the will to die. Soon afterwards I heard that she, too, was on a transport list. I was horrified, and went to see her, to ask if I could not do something. I found her unconscious, in delirium, on the tenth day of a typhus attack. What could I do? Perhaps it was better that she was spared the knowledge of her fate, than that she should wake up only to die.

In most cases we were forced to look on, inactive. Yet once I found myself in a position in which I could do something. I was told to report to the Political Section of the camp; there it turned out that an S.S. officer, who had nothing to do with the matter for which I had been summoned, wanted to talk to me. He first made sure that I was a doctor. Then he explained that in our compound there was a young woman lying ill with typhus in whose recovery he was greatly interested. Would I see to it that she was well looked after, and so forth? She was a Frau Lejmann from Frankfort-on-Main—a Jewish name. I was somewhat surprised, but promised to keep an eye on her, and went immediately to the hut for infectious diseases. The woman had passed the crisis and was lying on dirty blankets, in deadly exhaustion; she had lovely, big eyes in a pale, small face. I obtained sheets for her, and, as I happened to have an apple in my pocket, and

knew how one longs for fresh fruit after typhus, I gave it to her. Then we talked a little about Germany and about Frankfort, a town I know well. When I got up, she took hold of my hand and said: "I feel so lonely among all these Slavs, who speak languages I don't understand—I'm so glad to have spoken German again—you mean a bit of my home for me!" So deeply rooted was the love for their lost homeland in those people. . . .

Some days later there was another selection drive. From the end of August, 1943, to February, 1944, a selection took place every four weeks, not only in the hospital huts, but also in the camp itself; each time between 500 and 800 women were selected for the gas-chambers. It occurred to me at once that Frau Lejmann was sure to be among the victims, and I went to her hut. My fear was justified. The young woman shook with fear and despair and clutched imploringly at my hand. Again and again she said through clenched teeth: "Help me——" and then was overcome by a fresh paroxysm of weeping. I tried to calm her, although every word was senseless in that situation. Then I went away and began to think.

Shortly before, the camp doctor had warned me not to make myself disagreeably conspicuous, since I was due for release from the camp within the next few months. If I, a "German-Aryan" prisoner, now intervened on behalf of a Jewish woman, I risked provoking the anger of the Waffen S.S. It would endanger my release. Only a person who has been in a concentration camp, without knowing how long it would last, will be able to gauge what even the vaguest hope of liberation meant to me. When they separated me from my son—my only child—he was three years old: only a woman with a child of her own will be able to understand how deep, how difficult to bear is the longing of a mother for her little son. I walked up and down the camp road in the dusk of the winter evening, lonely and haunted. Everywhere grey barracks, watch-towers, electrified wire, ugliness and desolation. There was a chance for me to escape from here, to get away from this place of anguish—and should I gamble with it, by making myself suspect for the sake of a Frau Lejmann whom I did not even really know?

I remembered an edict of the Head Wardress, which I had read on a poster on the door of our hut the first day I was in the camp: "I have found that some of the Aryan prisoners, among them even Germans, still entertain friendly relations with Jewish inmates of the camp. I would remind you that such prisoners will have to wear the Jewish Star and be treated as Jewesses in the future." The poster was old and faded, and nobody paid any attention to it as a rule. But you never knew if the decree might not be resur-

rected in an official procedure such as I should have to tackle. If they reported me because of continuous favouritism to Jews, if they only put a note about it in my dossier, behind my back, my release would be out of the question for years. At other times it would not have been so very dangerous to talk to the camp doctor; but our boss just then was a particularly fanatical anti-Semite—a fact which ruled him out. I should have to address myself to other official quarters, and it was difficult for me to assess the consequences of such an act. There was little time left. I had to take a decision if I wanted to make an attempt with any prospect of success.

In my mind I saw my little boy and heard his touching voice as he begged me at the leave-taking, his small arms round my neck: "Mummy, stay with me!" And then the dark eyes of that young comrade-in-prison implored me, and a husky voice said: "I've been so glad to speak with a German again!"

I was gripped in the conflict not only between my boundless longing for freedom and life and my immense compassion for that unfortunate young creature, but also between the duty to help another as a doctor and a human being, and the duty of a mother to keep alive for her child—because every day in the camp meant new danger of death. Let nobody tell me that the decision was a foregone conclusion. I tortured myself and came to no resolve.

Then it dawned on me: I might have the right to tell myself that my life and my child were more important to me than a strange woman. But this was not the point. If I were now to fail, if I were to shrug my shoulders and let this one human being die, whom I might be able to save, only because I was afraid of the personal danger involved—then I should commit the same wrong which the whole German people was committing and for which it was being punished by the moral condemnation of the world. The people who decreed and executed all the atrocities were not so very many. But there was an infinite number of people who let those atrocities happen because they lacked courage, and because they evaded the issue with the sigh "What could I do?" when there might have been some feasible way of intervention. If I, too, had gone so far as to turn away in silence, from fear of staying on in the concentration camp, then I should be behaving just like those others outside who remained passive from fear of being sent to a concentration camp. Then the S.S. would indeed have "educated" me, as the Gestapo official put it when he sent me to the camp. But then the whole sacrifice of my personal life which I had taken upon me up till now would become meaningless—then I could have stayed at home and kept silent.

What decided my mental struggle was not compassion or a sense of duty. It was the hatred of a system which meant to break

me, to take my honour and self-respect from me. So I said in my mind to my little boy: "Child, perhaps you will have to wait still longer for your mummy. But when she comes back to you she wants to be able to look into your eyes—so that you won't have to be ashamed because your mother is German."

I went to the Political Department of the women's camp, reported to the S.S. officer on duty and explained that prisoner No. so-and-so had to-day been listed for transport, while I happened to know that Unterscharführer Draser of the General Political Department of the Camps laid great store on her recovery and had asked me to look after her. I submitted that the selection of that woman for a transport might not fit in with Unterscharführer Draser's wishes, and that they might prefer a different arrangement. I said all this looking as innocent and unconcerned as possible, just as if I had not the slightest idea what a "transport" really meant. The answer the S.S. man gave me was disconcerting and depressing: "It's just as well for you that you told us. It would have been an offence if you hadn't reported to us the Unterscharführer's wishes. Of course, if he needs the woman for something or other, she's out of the question. We'll have to take another in her place. Report the case at once to the Medical N.C.O."

So the exact opposite of the act I had dreaded would have brought punishment upon me! In a way, I was not astonished; it was impossible to foresee the reactions of those people. Also, whatever this S.S. officer might say, it was by no means certain that the medical N.C.O. would view the affair in the same way, and that Draser would be pleased with the publicity I had given to his predilection for Frau Lejmann—it might recoil on me, after all. But—and this was worse—by facing a great risk I had achieved nothing. If I rescued one woman, I pushed another to her doom, another who also wanted to live and had an equal right to live. "We'll have to take another in her place." And for this I risked never seeing my child again! Was there any sense in trying to behave decently? It was difficult not to despair.

The S.S. man's remark confirmed an old suspicion of mine, that the aim of the selections was not to pick out sick, physically weak women who in all probability would not have survived the "normal" life of the camp anyhow, but that a fixed number of women was scheduled for gassing in advance. If they did not find sufficient weak ones to make up that number, they would take perfectly healthy, robust prisoners instead. It was important to know it. I had often discussed the problem of the doctors' attitude during selections with my colleagues. Some of them used to hide the feeblest of their patients, hoping that the stronger ones would

be passed in any case. Yet under the existing conditions the weaker patients were doomed to die of their illnesses, and in their place the stronger women, who might have survived, went "through the chimney". So the result was a doubled death-roll.

A young Jewish colleague, wishing to avoid this, used to point out the more hopeless cases among her patients to the medical N.C.O.—others accused her of voluntarily co-operating in the selections. In fact, in our situation normal principles of human and professional ethics broke down, because the problems we had to face were previously non-existent, and in dealing with them we did not know what to do. And then there existed the danger that, caught in the blind alley of insoluble situations, people would renounce every moral principle.

The end of the Lejmann case was this: the first Medical N.C.O. whom I approached told me that Herr Draser should salvage his Jews all by himself, he—the speaker—did not want to "sully his fingers", in spite of his understanding of the situation. I went to another Medical N.C.O., and he at last arranged for Frau Lejmann's number to be taken off the list. At the following selections she was passed over, always with the same argument, which by then was generally known. But she fell ill with typhoid fever and paratyphoid, contracted tuberculosis, and finally I could no longer find out where she was. I believe that she died. It is a fact that sometimes one must do things for their own sake without regard for their actual results.

On another occasion I failed to live up to my principles. I had a friend, Gretl Stutz, a beautiful, elegant young woman from Prague. We had a few friends in common outside; we often wandered round the garden together and talked of the skiing we had done in the remote old times. She came to Auschwitz in summer, when life was simpler. She was afraid of the winter and of typhus, but she used to say: "I'm glad I've got you here—at least I can be sure that you'll look after me when I'm ill, and get medicine for me. My heart isn't exactly strong." She worked as a nurse in one of the convalescent blocks, where there were also some German patients.

Then the terrible winter of 1943-44 started, with its epidemics, which spread to the medical staff as well; for some time we had only about fifteen physically fit women doctors to cope with our 7,000 patients. That was the time when I had to work alone with my 700 patients, while in the block in which my friend was a nurse there was literally nobody to act as doctor for a whole week. She fell ill just at that time. I went there in the evening, dead tired from my own work, to see how she was getting on. As soon as I entered the hut and the women saw my white overall, they

shouted at me from every side: "Doctor, doctor, come to me! I'm in such pain . . . I can't breathe . . . I need a dressing. . . ." They clutched at my hands, at the hem of my overall, they pulled me from one side to the other, and so I had no other choice but to go on working, although I felt as if I were at the end of my tether. The next day I went there even later and went straight up to my friend. I gave her an injection of cardiazol. The others I warded off: "I just can't cope with any more to-day. I'll talk to our Chief Doctor; she'll have to send one of our colleagues here; I've got to look after 700 patients myself." Not unnaturally, they protested: "And why does she get an injection, and not we?" Then came a voice from the German corner: "Of course, you give something to the Jewess, and let us Germans die like dogs. You're a nice example of a German prisoner!"

At that time I was still counting on my release. And I lost courage. The next few evenings I asked a young Polish colleague, herself a convalescent, to look after my friend. I gave her camphor, and asked her to explain that I was too impossibly busy to come myself. I really was impossibly busy, but that was not the real reason for my staying away. After four days my friend was at long last transferred to the infectious ward where there were no German prisoners, and where the Senior herself was a Jewess. I hurried to her at once; she had a particularly virulent form of typhus—what we used to call "cold typhus", when the temperature varies for days on end between 96° and 97°, and then suddenly shoots up to 104°. When I got there she was already unconscious. She died shortly afterwards. I do not know whether, as a doctor, I could have saved her through closer and more continuous observation; in reality, I do not believe it. But, as a human being, I could have given her the feeling during her last few days that she was not alone. I know that she waited for me and counted on me. And I did not come.

The struggle for the victims of each selection lasted as a rule from one to three days, on one occasion even a whole week. On the first or second day after the selection the hospital huts were again put under embargo and the women fetched out from one after the other. At first they were taken to the ill-famed Hut 25, later also to a hut in the hospital compound. There they waited for death. I have never been able to comprehend why there was practically no resistance, only cries of despair, during any of the stages of the calvary. Once I saw the last stage from very close by. A runner burst into our hut and asked for twenty strong women of the staff to act as guards during a transport. I heard shouts; between the huts I saw excited prisoners standing about, against the rules. Smoke rose behind the roofs in the distance.

I had promised myself to keep in the background during any riot in the camp, because I realised that even in a successful rising the foremost rank would pay. But it is one thing to reason with oneself, and another to act. I hoped that all this meant murder and arson, and ran out of the hut to be with the others when we were at last striking out against those swine. I hurried to a spot from which I overlooked the "transport block". What I saw shattered me.

The gate of the hut was open. Prisoners formed cordons to the right and the left, and between them sick Jewish women were being driven out into the open. They walked on their bare feet, some naked, some in their night-dresses. The ground was covered with snow and pools of water. A few of the women had a blanket which a pitying nurse had let them keep, but the majority were chased from the hut without the cover of blankets.

Possibly this additional cruelty was not even deliberately imposed by the S.S. But it is difficult to speak about an act of brutality on the part of the other prisoners, if one remembers that in many huts there was only a single blanket between two or three patients.

The sight of those pitiful figures, emaciated, covered with sores, shivering with the cold and the fear of death, was like a blow in the face. How could those miserable creatures have revolted? The only guard was an S.S. woman—Wardress Hasse, an evil, vulgar, bloated female, who stood there, arms akimbo, a rubber truncheon in one hand, and made them hurry. Farther down the camp road smoked the small tar stove of a road-making party—this was what had kindled my precipitate hopes. And the healthy nurses, prisoners themselves, who formed the cordons? A young girl near me said: "If you don't do it, they send you along with them." Nobody who has never passed through a similar test has a right to condemn those women.

Hut 25 had room for approximately 500 persons. Before Christmas, 1944, they packed it with 2,000 women, some stark naked, some in rags, without any palliasses or blankets. The hut was, of course, unheated. The women were given a little soup, and no bread. The soup cauldrons were pushed through a gap in the door by the fire guard. There was nothing remotely like a distribution of food. What would have been the use? Once I tried to look through a window, but saw nothing except a blur. Later on, a girl from the fire guard told me about it. She said that the floor of the hut was covered knee-high with corpses. Over them lay the dying and the half-dead, and those who were still alive squatted on the top. Whenever the door was opened they only asked, imploringly: "Please, won't they fetch us for the gas at

last? We can't stand it any more!" The stench in the hut was overpowering. I have no reason to doubt the veracity of this description. During the ten days which passed before the women were taken away to the gas-chamber 700 out of 2,000 had died. Another time several hundred women were taken back to their huts, after having been in Hut 25, and then fetched again after a few more days: the Camp Command had had to wait for the permission of the Ministry of the Interior in Berlin before taking them "on transport".

The index-cards of gassed prisoners were marked with the letters S.B. (*Sonderbehandlung*), and thus official orderliness had its due. Still, there must have been some difficulty somewhere; whenever inspections from Berlin were expected the camp office worked at high pressure, sometimes through the night, to remove all those index-cards from the files.

The Camp Doctor did not take part in the gassing itself. He only selected the women, classifying them in two categories—those who might be expected to recover soon from their illness, and those who "could not be rendered fit for work within a reasonable time, in view of the medical facilities existing in the camp". This formula served to establish the so-called innocence of the doctors, because the classification of the women from this point of view was not against their professional honour. The Camp Commandant sent the Camp Doctor's reports to Berlin and asked for permission to subject the women of the second category to "special treatment" (*Sonderbehandlung*). Again this term was ambiguous. Special treatment might mean many things, such as deck-chairs, or a daily ration of unskimmed milk for the patients, rumours of which were repeatedly circulated by the Camp Command. If any of the men in the Berlin offices were asked about it now, they would certainly assert that they were ignorant of the real meaning of the special treatment they authorised. The Camp Commandant, on the other hand, was covered by the permission—no, by the order—from Berlin. Thus the ring of deferred responsibility was closed. Nobody was culpable—and so all of them were culpable.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE PRISONERS

PEOPLE WHO were at liberty during the years of horror usually receive us, the ex-prisoners of the concentration camps, with a mixture of curiosity and compassion. They sometimes even over-rate our physical sufferings, for had we been continually subjected to the very worst conditions known to have existed in the camps, we could not have survived any more than our countless fellow-prisoners.

Almost every prisoner passed through the harsh school of camp life in the first months of his or her detention. In our camp at Auschwitz there were two small groups which went through this stage rather more quickly and easily than the others: the doctors of all nationalities, and the German Communists. The doctors were at once posted to the prisoners' hospital, where they were most urgently needed. The German Communist women were immediately given "functions"—that is to say, special positions of trust in the camp—as part of the prisoners' self-administration, and enjoyed the backing of their party comrades.

The fate of a prisoner was usually decided right at the beginning. If she succeeded in obtaining a small post that carried with it certain privileges, she was able to survive the camp—unless she had the misfortune to fall victim to one of the dangerous infectious diseases, despite the relatively better care that she was given. Those who failed to make a niche for themselves were doomed, although exceptional energy or toughness might delay the end. A prisoner who had won a privileged position for herself then had to defend it with efficiency, vitality and an iron will, if not by worse means, and to be able to look on while others, possibly far more valuable as individuals, succumbed because they lacked precisely those qualities—and luck.

Possibly we deserve the greatest compassion because of some of the qualities which aided our survival.

Since this was so, and since it could not be claimed that it was a case of the survival of the best, we survivors sometimes meet with an understandable reserve: what sort of people were the concentration camp prisoners?

Before trying to answer this question so far as the women's camp at Auschwitz is concerned, I must emphasise that the type of

prisoners, particularly Germans, that we knew there was quite different from that in the women's camp at Ravensbrück, to judge by all reports available to me. Ravensbrück was *the* political concentration camp for German women, therefore it was dominated and directed by the political prisoners and, on the whole, by the very best among them. They formed a community which received, protected and encouraged new-comers, or kept them under control when necessary. In Auschwitz there was very little of that spirit. We had only between 100 and 150 genuine political prisoners of German origin; I say "genuine", as it would be a mistake to include in their number every girl who wore the red "political" badge just because she had had a love affair with a Pole. On the other hand, this figure includes not only women imprisoned for active political work—for instance, in an underground organisation—but also those who were in the camp for alleged espionage or, like myself, for "aiding and abetting" Jews. Although the German political group was favoured and given the best positions in the prisoners' self-administration, its members were swallowed up by the mass of 30,000 prisoners. This fact explains many features of camp life which would otherwise be puzzling.

(a) *The Germans*

The overwhelming majority of the German political prisoners were Communists. Apart from myself, I met only one member of the Social-Democratic Party. At a time when I did not dream that I should ever be arrested and sent to a concentration camp, a friend who had been in Dachau said to me: "There was one man who kept up my morale—my Hut Senior, a German Communist. His attitude, his inner strength, his comradeship were the most inspiring things in all that horror." I expected similar experiences when I came to Auschwitz Camp: I did not have them—at least, not in this form.

At first it was partly my own fault. Though I had not been physically maltreated and had not seen the worst, my initial experiences in camp had stunned me. I could not find my bearings. In the hospital hut I had a bed to myself, I was allowed to eat at a "private dinner table", I was brought warm water for washing. All this I accepted unquestioningly, and still found life terrible, unbearable. I had not yet realised the way in which most of the other prisoners had to live, and found it hard to adjust myself to an existence which to the less fortunate seemed princely. I believed myself to be brave and modest, while in the eyes of others I appeared conceited and exacting. There was also something else. My fellow-prisoners knew, partly from my papers,

partly from my remarks, that my father was a landowner, that my husband came from a family of Rhineland industrialists, that my father-in-law had been Police President of Cologne and had kept his post even during the first years of the Hitler régime, until the political persecution of Catholics in 1936, when he was dismissed because of his connections with the Centre Party. Certainly I had long since dissociated myself from the social circles of my origin, but something of that *milieu* must have left its imprint on my manner. At least, I once heard a Hut Senior with whom I had quarrelled—she had boxed my ears and I had retaliated—shout furiously after me: “Those damned aristocrats . . . !”

Then there was also the fact I have already mentioned: I was not equal to my medical tasks under the existing conditions. I used to feel like killing off my patients with morphia injections—I, who had been, and still am, an uncompromising adversary of euthanasia!—because I considered the whole existence of the prisoners, let alone that of the sick, as a mere prelude to death, a form of vegetating without a chance of survival, which deserved to be ended sooner rather than later. Such thoughts and manners placed me, against my will and without my realising the impression I gave, in a position fatally close to that of the powers-that-be. This impression was further strengthened by a certain consideration shown to me by the S.S. men who dealt with us in the camp hospital, above all the S.S. doctors, who were influenced by social standing and saw in me a professional colleague. Dr. Rohde had studied in Marburg-on-the-Lahn during my time; we had taken our meals in the same inn, we had often drunk a glass of wine in the same tavern in the evenings—it did not make me feel nearer to him, but it made him feel nearer to me. This consideration of the S.S. doctors for me made things much easier at the beginning and during my illness, but it also provoked the understandable distrust of my political fellow-prisoners. This hurt and isolated me. Thus, the first friends I made were not compatriots, but French, Polish or Jewish women, who knew nothing about my private life, or were indifferent to questions of social position. In time I began to understand my difficulties, to reckon with them, and to overcome them. Afterwards my relations with the German Communists in the camp were good, though I never belonged to their particular set.

It is not easy to judge those Communists. Most of them had been in prison or camp as much as seven to nine years: such a long period of imprisonment changes people, particularly women. They had their virtues and the faults of their virtues. Towards their party comrades of all nations their comradeship and readiness to help were great and genuine, but those who did not profess

faith in the Communist Party had a difficult time with them. Occasionally they took non-Communists under their wing, but their choice of protégées was arbitrary, and did not always fall upon the best elements. They had incredible stamina. They had created fairly tolerable conditions for themselves, all were dressed rather well, cleanly and neatly. Yet sometimes it was repellent to see how, in spite of their political creed, they would claim a better standard of existence for themselves, as their natural right, while they remained callous—at least outwardly—in the face of other people's suffering. But, then, it must be admitted that it would have been impossible to maintain the highest pitch of indignation and horror throughout so many years! Most of the German Communists had experienced every sort of hardship during the early stages of their imprisonment, now they were inclined to treat new-comers on the principle: "Let her fight her way through as we had to do!" This attitude was made more understandable by the fact that, even with the help of their privileged positions, they could not have intervened for more than a few of their fellow-prisoners. It was only natural that they thought first of their party comrades.

Their political attitude was narrow and fanatical. It mostly derived from the period before 1933; during their detention they had hardly developed or enlarged it. It was a symptom of the general shrinking of their horizon, in itself due to obvious psychological reasons. The excessive number of petty intrigues among them sprang from the same roots. The inner life of people who had not been long in prison was still centred in the world outside, their family, their work, their friends; their real life was elsewhere, not in the camp; they let events pass by them, like a horrifying film. But for those veterans of the camp the reality of life outside had become blurred. They had transferred their ambitions and emotions to the life inside the camp. Therefore they would fight for positions not only because they intended to survive, but also for their own sake, because it satisfied their need to win power, recognition and a following within the precincts. Some of them invested their whole being in these matters, and so lost much of their intellectual and even moral standards. Among the women who were punished for jewel thefts by floggings of twenty-five strokes were a few—isolated—German Communists. The woman who was visited by the S.S. driver of the lorry loading the corpses was a Communist. Later she had a child by him. But she was nearing her fortieth year, had been nine years in prison, and had always longed to have a child; she could not know how long her detention would last nor whether she would still be able to have a child once she was free.

It was depressing that so many had capitulated—almost in S.S. manner—before the chance of getting a diamond ring, or white bread, or a position. But how could one have demanded more from women who had lived so many terrible years in such surroundings? Rather it was astounding, and a tremendous achievement, that some of them had preserved their personal integrity in spite of everything. But the truly frightening thing was that women who had striven for that integrity, who still took life and ethics seriously, proved in the end too small for their overwhelming destiny, and never noticed when they acted on principles which were in reality those of National Socialism. Indeed, the most dangerous victory National Socialism ever won was that it imposed itself on the minds of its adversaries.

I remember an incident which occurred at the beginning of my medical work in the German sick hut. Two girls with typhus shared a bed; one died, the other survived. Shortly before her death the first had received a food parcel from home; the convalescent grabbed it. The women in the surrounding bunks—all of them either ill with typhus or just recovering from it—saw her eating the food, and apparently the sight was too much for them. They reported it, as a case of theft among comrades, to the Camp Senior, a German Communist. Their contention was that the girl had appropriated the parcel while the other woman was still alive, though in a coma.

So that shrewd, serious, energetic woman, the Communist Party worker from Berlin, stood there and judged, called in and recognised in her authority by her comrades who voluntarily accepted her leadership. She had to pass moral judgment on a petty tragedy of human suffering. Fully conscious of her task and responsibility, she wanted to do justice. She did not shout at the girl, she did not beat her, she gravely said: "We won't bring this affair before the S.S. Doctor, but will settle it among ourselves. It must not happen here that one comrade is not safe from another. You have committed a wrong against our community, you shall expiate it by work for the community. You will work as a cleaner here in the hut."

Well, yes—it was beautifully said, and difficult to contradict. The girl was only eight days over the typhus crisis, and had a toxic weakness of the heart. We attempted, rather timidly, to draw the Camp Senior's attention to the danger heavy manual work would entail. But she had no high opinion of doctors, and thought she knew quite enough about such matters herself. The girl did not look very weak (she may have owed this to the food parcel!), and her appearance was more convincing than the Latin word "myocarditis". I wondered. The Camp Senior herself had had

typhus. Had she forgotten that hunger is sheer torture to a convalescent? Some weeks later, when I was recovering from typhus, I used to shed tears whenever the bread distribution started at the other end of the hut, so that my turn came a few minutes later. Had the Camp Senior forgotten, or had she never felt that torture, because she was a prominent veteran prisoner who had never lacked sufficient food? Yes, but the wretched girl had robbed a defenceless sick woman! . . . Had the other been dead, or had she still been breathing? Not even we, the doctors, were quite certain who among our patients were still technically alive at a given moment. If the other girl had woken up from her coma and found the bitterly needed parcel gone, it would have been very wrong indeed; it would have been a crime. But—now she was dead, and the other at least alive. Who had more right to the dead woman's legacy, humanly speaking, than the young girl who had done her the last little services, who had put the glass of water to her parched lips, and then felt the body at her side grow cold? Would the other women have reported the premature appropriation of the heritage if the girl had controlled her craving and shared the food with them?

With some difficulty it was conceded that the sinner should at first not be forced to help carry the heavy soup cauldrons. The Camp Senior explained that she herself had got up immediately after her typhus. (But she did not have to work as a cleaner!) So the girl started working. She was supposed to make beds and scrub the floor, and she actually wielded the broom, with little effect. A week later her heart and circulation failed her, and she died.

One death among ten thousand : it did not count, but it weighed. For this was a human being who might have lived. She had died, not through the crimes of the S.S. (or not only because of them), and not through a crime committed by prisoners who falsely called themselves comrades. No; she had died because of the human and moral failure of somebody who desired to be a champion of a new ethic, and was neither amoral, nor dominated by selfish motives, nor made callous by her long imprisonment. All this would have been understandable and pardonable under the general conditions of the camp; but the opposite was the case. The Camp Senior had acted from a conscious moral principle. She wanted to keep the flag flying in the middle of chaos and total moral collapse. She wanted to uphold the law of decency. But in her rigid, meagre, cramped determination she could not find the way to simple human tolerance and kindness. It was bad to think that, if she had "brought the affair before the S.S. Doctor", he would probably have let the girl stay in bed on our

urgent recommendation, because he was completely indifferent to the fate of our food parcels.

Or did I misread the case? Had the Camp Senior thought out what she was doing? Had she deliberately risked the girl's life so as to maintain the correctness and authority of ourself-administration? One was as possible as the other.

The problem of the prisoners' discipline and honesty in dealings with the S.S. imposed its own solution: it could only be—total theft and sabotage of everything belonging to the S.S. But this natural law of behaviour made it all the more difficult to solve the problem of self-imposed restrictions in the interest of an internal decency of camp life. The prisoners' delegates—the "functionaries"—had as much power over the life or death of their comrades as the S.S. themselves, and were no more forced to account for it than were the S.S. Everything, then, depended on the way in which they built up their system of responsibilities—admittedly a very heavy task. They had to face the question of whether the community—the "State"—had the primacy over the well-being of individuals, the question of whether it was right to sacrifice the individual to a higher purpose; and hence the age-old problem which, ever since Macchiavelli, has beset men in politics—the problem of "ends and means". This is, surely, one of the fundamental problems of human ethics, but it does not admit an absolutely valid solution, even less a practical application of an absolute solution. It will always be necessary to ask: "Which ends can hallow which marginal means?" And it will probably always be a matter of differences in quantity, of a constant weighing and levelling.

This was so very difficult for many of the German Communists among the prisoners, because they were not conscious of the contradiction inherent in their theoretical position. Whether one should sacrifice the single human being to a higher end is a question of morality which has been solved concretely in each historical period; the historic actors derived the detachment and strength to act as they did from their subjective conviction that theirs was the right solution. But a Socialist whose aim is an order of society which, for the first time, accepts the happiness and dignity of the individual as its *raison d'être* must be aware that to him the problem of "ends and means" has a different aspect. There are aims which may be pursued best—which perhaps must be pursued—at the price of the sacrifice of individuals. If the aim is to build pyramids, or the West Wall, it will be necessary to let slaves perish in the course of the work. Perhaps it was admissible to burn witches or Jews for the greater glory of a deity—at least it is difficult to prove the contrary to somebody who is convinced that

he has the right to do so and that his deity approves of it. But there is one case when it can be proved that certain means are inadmissible for the end, not alone for moral reasons, but also for logical reasons: the case of the Socialist.

If one's end is to free the unknown human being from the fetters of a necessity in which he is but a means; if the end is to create a social order for the human individual, with his happiness and personal dignity for its purpose and meaning—then it would be a self-contradiction to pursue this end by sacrificing precisely the happiness and dignity of the individual. Other ends may admit the sacrifice of the individual, out of their intrinsic logic, and of them the saying that the end justifies the means may be true. But the Socialist end cannot be justified by such means, because they would annul it. This fact makes it so difficult to realise, but it also constitutes its moral superiority.

The Communists in our camp had not quite understood this. I always hoped that the Communists outside had been learning it in the meantime: the destiny of mankind will depend on whether they will learn it yet.

As the German Communist prisoners failed in human ethics—a failure springing from a deep-seated uncertainty—they also failed in cultural matters. Not that they were uncultured: it was often astonishing to what extent those women had preserved their interest in books, songs and personal neatness. But whatever they did to civilise our communal life was stamped by an utter lack of creative imagination, which could not be explained by the mere fact that they were women. Whenever they attempted to draw the simple things of life, birth, love and death into the sphere of their cultural activities they failed as dismally as they had failed outside.

Birth in the camp was a tragedy fraught with danger for mother and child. The "bed" was the heating-bench, which was covered with a dirty eiderdown, and there could be no thought of anti-septic precautions. Sometimes, when one of the little German prostitutes had a child, she was suddenly promoted to the rank of a "German Mother" and released from the camp in recognition, although she would probably have been punished by three days in the "standing bunker" if she was caught meeting the man who fathered the child. Once the father of such a "camp child" was even permitted to visit mother and baby. He was a habitual criminal from Berlin who worked for the Camp Commandant as a gardener, and obtained from him personally a permit to enter the women's camp. He turned up in our sick hut, happy and embarrassed by the curious glances of our 400 patients. Under

his arm he had a parcel with a woollen bed-jacket, wrapped in pink tissue paper, and a card: "Warmest congratulations from the Camp Commandant and Wife." Among our "anti-social prisoners" the conviction spread that the only way to get out of the camp was to have a child, and the birth rate rose steeply, despite all risks. Then the Head Wardress thought it too much of a good thing, for it threatened to undo all her educational work, and she put a brake on it: the babies born later had to stay in camp with their mothers. Altogether, even if things went off smoothly, we did not feel like celebrating a birth in the camp.

Love had for its stage the rooms of the Hut Seniors, the store-rooms, the field where men and women worked together, and—the most popular meeting-place—the ground next to the lorry which loaded the dead. For this reason men from the neighbouring camps paid heavily to be posted to the undertaker work-party. It was a love which had to seek the dark and precluded celebrations. Only once was there a "wedding feast". A young Spanish woman had made her way to Auschwitz from her country, on foot, with her small boy, and begged the Camp Command to let her marry little Juan's father, a Viennese and a member of the Austrian Workers' Militia, who had fought in the International Brigade, and was now detained in Auschwitz Camp: if she could not be married to him, her family would cast her out for good. In a generous mood the Commandant granted permission, and the wedding was staged. The matrimonial contract was signed in the room of the Political Section. The band of prisoners in striped uniforms played and accompanied the newly wedded pair to Hut 24, the camp brothel, where the girls gave them a meal and the two had a room to themselves for the night, with the Commandant's permission. I was not present at the ceremony, I only heard about it: it sounded like a scene from the "Beggars' Opera". Next day the young wife had to leave and the husband stayed on in the camp. This happened only once, and it was almost more harrowing than the forbidden love of the camp, which sometimes wore a romantic halo.

What we could celebrate, what dominated our whole life, was death. But the only prisoners capable of honouring it in simple, dignified ceremonies were the devout Polish Catholics whose prayers still came from their hearts.

The Capo of our hospital kitchen was a Communist from Munich, Anni Blumauer, who had been in prison since 1933. This plain, decent-looking proletarian woman did a great deal for her fellow-prisoners. Daily she provided extra tea rations for the very ill patients; to one she brought a pillow, to another a few biscuits; during the first typhus epidemic she constantly passed

along the rows of bunks in the infectious hut, without catching the disease herself. When the second epidemic broke out in the following winter she was advised not to risk it again. A good vaccine (Weigel's) was found for her, she was inoculated, fell ill very soon afterwards, and died. Her inexplicable immunity was destroyed by the inevitable result of the inoculation, *i.e.* the temporary lowering of her resistance to this infection. The German prisoners felt her death with deep, genuine sorrow. She was laid on a bier, the girls found pine branches and flowers, there were wreaths, and even two candles by her head. Late in the evening, before the lorry came, we gathered round the body. I had expected that somebody would say a few words, but none of her closer party friends felt authorised, and we others did not wish to intrude. Silently we carried the bier to the lorry and set it down on the ground. One of us said: "We ought to sing something." Yes—but what? The moving song for the victims of the Russian Revolution of 1905, the "Immortal Victims", was known to very few and seemed too impersonal. A fighting song—the Internationale? Did they not dare it, or did they feel that it was out of place where the fight was over and a human being had found peace? We agreed on the beautiful old Lutheran hymn "*So nimm denn meine Hände*", but the women had sung it only rarely, and did not know the intricate melody. After the first few bars, somewhat out of tune, the chorus petered out and then stopped. We gave it up and left, most of us feeling that it would have been better if we had never tried.

The political activity of the German Communist women did not seem very extensive. I am not fully qualified to judge of it, as I never belonged to their inner circle. But certainly I did not observe them propagating their ideas among their fellow-prisoners, nor were they as successful in this as the women Communists from France, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia (who, of course, had not been imprisoned for the same length of time): they did not act as the progressive vanguard of their national group, as their programme demanded of them, and they were not even the leaders of all the anti-Fascist German women in the camp.

Most other national groups, particularly the smaller ones, were closely knit, obviously organised, and linked by an exemplary solidarity. The leaders looked after every one of their members, regardless of whether she was in the camp as a partisan fighter or as a black-market agent; they kept track of her, tried to get her better work, brought her food and medicine when she was ill in hospital—in short, the members of a group gave each other the support which made life in camp bearable. All those groups were headed by Communist women. They were the undisputed leaders,

and they felt the obligation to set an example by their personal conduct. Even in our camp, where lying, moral filth and baseness were trump-cards—even there triumphed the absolute integrity and uncompromising strength of character which shone in the faces of some of those women like a sacred flame; and it imposed itself not only on their political friends, but also on the prostitutes, the prisoners with a green badge, and even on the S.S.

I have already mentioned my French colleague. There was also a young Yugoslav partisan, who was one of the grandest women I met in the camp—beautiful, strong, proud and noble. She looked as the Nazis would have liked their women leaders to look; she had golden hair, a glowing skin and wide, shining eyes. Her clean, strong features had an expression such as Napoleon's mother, Laetitia, might have had in her youth when she was riding through the Corsican bush. She had come to our camp as one of a large group of women partisans; on her arrival she was given the German badge, although she protested in broken German and declared that she felt a Yugoslav. "Never mind how you feel," was the answer, and while all her friends who came from the same region had to wear the red badge with the letter J (for "Jugoslawisch"), she was an honorary German, to her great sorrow. The Gestapo of her home town had decreed that she should at once be sent to the punishment company, because of her dangerous political qualifications. But she fell ill in quarantine after her arrival, and while she was still in the sick ward during her convalescence Camp Leader Hässler happened to pass. He took her by the hand, and led her to one of the convalescence huts where he told the Hut Senior: "Take this girl into your room service, then you'll have at least one decent person there." He had not known her, he had merely seen her. There was no more talk of the punishment company; the clerk kept silent about the original Gestapo decree, and later the girl was made Hut Senior in the hospital. It was a pleasure to work with her; never was I able to do so much for the patients as when I collaborated with her. Never would she let the German patients feel that she, the Yugoslav, was their superior; never did she take any of the supplementary rations, which at that time were given only to the German prisoners, for herself or her compatriots. But at three in the morning she got up, secretly, and cooked a big pot of soup from stolen vegetables and other things which the healthy Yugoslav prisoners supplied out of their food parcels from home, and distributed it among her country-women in the hospital. She accomplished her task in an exemplary way, with complete devotion, calm and friendliness. This girl was an enthusiastic supporter of

Tito. She may have been the best, but in her group there were many who almost reached her level.

I should have liked to know the mainspring of her strength of conviction, but she spoke little about herself. Once she told me that the Gestapo man in charge of her case had tried to discuss things with her. He even wanted to give her an opportunity to escape, and so win her sympathy, but she told him that a time would come when he himself would be glad to escape with his life. I asked her if she had never for a single second doubted the German defeat, and she answered: "No, because a Fascist country can't win a war." She thought that Germany had lost because she was a Fascist country. In my opinion, the Fascist form of organisation is best equipped for war; one of the reasons why it is so hateful is its capacity for drawing the last reserves of strength out of a country and transferring them from the civilian to the military sector. Therefore I wondered at the Yugoslav Communist's force of conviction, based on what seemed to me a mistaken judgment.

People of a similarly high moral authority with friend and enemy alike were to be found, apart from those exceptional Communists, among the religious women. A genuine, unselfconscious piety, tied to the forms of the Christian Church, and expressed not only in personal conduct and attitude, but also in prayers, rites and ceremonies, existed to any noticeable extent only among the Polish women. With them it was almost a matter of course, as much with working-class and peasant women as with aristocrats and intellectuals. Theirs was a different case from that of most religious people in Central and Western Europe (at least townspeople, and especially intellectuals), who first revolt against the dogma of the Church and then, after a life of revolutionary free thought and scepticism, slowly become sceptical towards that very ideology of free thought; or, after a life of religious indifference that leaves them metaphysically dissatisfied, try spasmodically to find the way back to the bosom of the Church. Nor was it that the Poles defended their inherited faith, consciously and defiantly, against the pressure or the predominance of a lack of faith. They had never left that faith, it had the unbroken warmth and dignity of an untried collective belief, the same warmth and dignity which belief in Communism had assumed in some of the Russian women. Once we asked Lyuba, the lovely Russian journalist who worked with us as a nurse and cared for her patients—most of them Polish aristocrats—with the devotion and self-denial of a nun, whether she was a convinced Communist. She answered: "I'm not a Communist, I have a Communist soul." In her mouth this was not an empty phrase.

Here and there among the German prisoners there was religious faith, but it took the shape of silent dialogues with a God of whom most of them despaired. The Germans in the camp, who suffered the worst moral abasement, not only of their persons but of their whole nation, had lost their faith in the mild Christian God of the bright little Baroque churches of the villages, or in the majestic God of the soaring Gothic cathedrals. Their only conception of God was Jehovah the Avenger, the stern God of the Old Testament. On Him they counted as the All-Powerful who would destroy the evil-doers and the apostates, visiting their iniquities unto the third and fourth generation. Those among the Germans who did not sink into apathy, or did not have the inner strength to rise above the situation—those who sought consolation in faith—turned in the camp into "Bible Students" ("*Bibelforscher*", Members of the League of Earnest Bible-Students). They joined that group of strange women who accepted everything calmly as though it did not concern them, with the smile of the initiate who has achieved the flight from reality into the world of mysticism.

In the peculiar life of the camp, however, this sort of escape from reality was at the same time a special form of adjustment to the new reality. The Bible-Students had discovered a method of impressing the S.S. and obtaining a position in the camp such as few other prisoners possessed. In Ravensbrück Camp they had a hut to themselves. They refused any kind of work which had the slightest connection with the German war effort; they even refused to do a stitch in the workshop where uniforms were made. The authorities put them in an unheated hut, without any food; ice-cold water was poured on them from a hose, then they were left standing in the open, in winter; afterwards they were locked up in the dark cell for days on end. Many died, but the survivors remained firm. They asserted that they would not try to escape, but would do nothing but civilian work. In Auschwitz, where the prisoners were treated from a more commercial point of view than in Ravensbrück, the attitude of the Bible-Students was doubly exploited. They did all the jobs which required reliability and offered comparatively great opportunities for escape. The S.S. employed them as their personal servants. They were the only prisoners who could move freely, without S.S. escort, in the "outer camp area"—that is to say, between the various camps belonging to the Auschwitz group. In Dachau I found two Bible-Students who had worked as cooks in an S.S. rest centre in the Beskide Mountains, 20 miles from Auschwitz. When the Russian Army was moving towards Auschwitz they were alone in the building. They quietly waited there for three days, until two S.S. men came to fetch them; in the last sledge that passed through the

narrow corridor still open to the Germans they were taken to the hell of Ravensbrück. From there they were transferred to Dachau. Not for a single moment did they doubt God's counsel, which would liberate them, so that they would be able to continue in their mission.

In comparison, the German Communists seemed lesser people. They were more petty, less serious, more insignificant, even though there were a few sympathetic women among them who showed comradeship to prisoners of all nations. They were strong on one point: all the German Communists kept themselves free from that nationalism which often assumed an evil shape in the concentration camp. I am not thinking so much of the hatred of some groups for others—it existed, but in a submerged form—as of the complete egotism of a group on behalf of its members.

So far as the German political prisoners were concerned, the S.S. respected the correctness, discipline, reason and courage which they had shown in the chaotic conditions of the early days; at the same time they hoped to corrupt us by setting us above our comrades of other nationalities. Our position was infinitely difficult. There were Christmas celebrations only for Germans, supplementary rations only for Germans, films and concerts only for Germans. In short, even in the concentration camp we were meant to feel ourselves members of the *Herrenvolk*. How much misunderstanding, envy and intrigue it caused, in a place where the slightest favour could mean life or death—and how difficult it was to remain firm!

Even though the camp authorities primarily favoured German political prisoners, the others—the “black” and “green”—also profited from their general method. Was it surprising that it went to their heads? If a little tart who had been an outcast in the world outside could say to a Polish or Jewish university graduate: “Get out, I’m a Reich German!” she felt uplifted and honoured, perhaps for the first time in her miserable little life. It led to a general depravation. Many of them were truly the N.C.O.s of the S.S., in the worst sense. Their familiarity with the S.S. women—the wardresses—sometimes went so far that they were taken secretly to the nearest local cinema. When the wardress who succeeded Johanna Bormann in the outlying camp of Babice gave a party, she invited not only ten S.S. men, but also two German Capos as female company for them. The Head Wardress had forbidden the wardresses, who hated her even more bitterly than we did, to take any parcels out of the camp. She wanted to restrict their thieving, which she considered her private monopoly. Thereupon the wardresses went to the rooms of German Hut Seniors and changed there, putting on the stolen silk underclothes

underneath their uniforms. And even though it was all done in secret, it was known to the other prisoners who starved and froze. Oh, yes, those little prostitutes, the "anti-social" prisoners, had power; they had rooms for themselves, food, clothes, the services of other prisoners, indulged in love affairs among themselves or with men—how could they have been part of a group with social consciousness and solidarity?

They were a motley crowd, with good as well as bad points. They came to Auschwitz after a certain negative selection. For the S.S. and the prisoners alike Auschwitz was a "punishment camp". Prisoners were transferred from Ravensbrück to Auschwitz either for elimination on political grounds, or if they had proved too much of a liability in the other camp—in other words, if they were truly "anti-social". Equally, the best and the worst of the prisoners were in the punishment company. In spring 1942, and again in the autumn, 1,000 women prisoners of Ravensbrück Camp were selected for Auschwitz, but volunteers for the transfer were also admitted. Those who applied were mainly girls from the "punishment block" of Ravensbrück, trying to escape from the unbearable hardships there. In Auschwitz some of them declared they would go back to Ravensbrück "on their knees", if only they were allowed to—and the rest were let loose in our camp, to grab as much as they could. Eighty per cent. of them died of typhus. The survivors showed a fantastic vitality and energy; they would have made useful members of a highway robber's band—though they were not useful for much else. They stole like magpies, betrayed one another, and hated the prisoners from higher social strata, particularly if they feared that the latter despised them.

Though one might have assumed that the absolute equality of utter misery reigned in the camp, the problem of class differences played an enormous role there. It existed doubly, as a continuation of the class problems of the outside world, and as the problem of class differences arising in the concentration camp itself. The two sets of facts and problems overlapped.

To belong to a higher social stratum could be an advantage, or a great disadvantage, but it was never unimportant. It was an advantage to speak several languages, to be a doctor or a scientist, to be able to draft letters and so forth; it increased the chances of getting a good post and keeping one's head above water. But if the chance did not come off, if one had to work in the fields as a common prisoner, it became the worst possible disadvantage to be at the mercy of work-trained prisoners and ruthless wardresses or sentries. It was an advantage to be able to keep the S.S. at bay through a certain social adroitness and poise; it was a

disadvantage as soon as one had to do with one of the S.S. people who were out "to give the toffs what for". It was an advantage when friendly, robust fellow-prisoners, of the working classes helped one, if somewhat patronisingly, to tackle the discomfort of primitive living conditions; it was a disadvantage when one could not hold one's own with others and was stunned, too soft, too civilized and too considerate.

I always tried to keep myself free from an instinctive favouritism for women of my class, but I am not sure that I was always successful. For instance, when I began my work in the Polish hut I did not speak their language. All the sick women were lying in bed in the same sort of night-dresses, and differences of property or social standing did not show up immediately. Yet the nurses put the society ladies from Warsaw and Cracow together in one or two rooms—"rooms" was the term for a certain number of bunks in charge of one nurse—and the working-class women, who were the majority, in the other rooms. When the hut became so overcrowded that it was necessary to put a second patient into a bunk, the two rooms of the "ladies" were left unmolested until in the rest of the hut there were already three patients in each bunk. I did not always find the courage to oppose this.

I tried to release patients from hospital solely on the strength of medical considerations. The wealthy Poles got more food parcels and recovered more quickly. But when I wanted to dismiss one of them she would talk to me in German or French, she would explain her physical ailments, describe her tragedy and that of her family; I would be in personal contact with her—and then I would find it even more difficult to send her out into the unbearable camp winter. Often I let myself be persuaded. The other women could not do that, they could only look at me with sad eyes, and they remained numbers to me. There were countless imponderables, and consequently infinite dissatisfaction and resentment.

Then there was the class structure of the camp as such. It was dictated by the system of the prisoners' self-administration. Prisoners were grouped according to the huts in which they lived, and according to the working parties to which they were posted. The idea was to make both groupings coincide as much as possible: for instance, the whole kitchen "commando" lived in a special hut, as did the stores working party, and so on. But the two systems often cut across each other.

The lowest rank in the hierarchy of "functionaries" in command of others was the Deputy Instructor, then followed the Instructor, the Capo, and in some cases, when several working parties were occupied together on the same job, a Chief Capo.

Nearly every German prisoner who arrived at the camp fairly fit, not too old, and in her right mind, could reckon on being appointed at least a Deputy Instructor after the first week. This meant that she was in charge of a few women during working hours, and in most cases had no longer to do manual work herself. It also meant that the prisoners under her had the greatest interest in not being beaten, kicked or over-worked by her, nor put in a spot where they would have to stand in mud and water, or exposed to the eyes of the S.S. In short, they had to do their best to win her favour, by giving her a share of their food parcels from home, or of stolen goods, or, at the worst, of their own rations. The Instructor's favour was more precious, and she never did manual work herself. All this applied in an even higher degree to the Capos. Chief among these was the "Camp Capo", one of the most important persons in the camp, who was responsible for the organisation of all working parties and for order throughout the whole of the camp, except the huts. There was a parallel hierarchy in the huts. In each one the Hut Senior and her Deputy were the absolute rulers.

The Hut Seniors were queens in their own right, with staffs of from five to ten women for the "room services", to keep the hut in order and distribute the food. They were supposed not to lay hands on the prisoners under them, but many did, with the same impunity as the S.S. people. If an ordinary prisoner complained about them or had some sort of dispute with them, the Camp Senior as well as the wardresses invariably decided that the Hut Seniors were in the right. It was almost impossible to get rid of one of those "functionaries" in the normal way—that is, by arguing that she was not up to her position, or abused it. It was usual to try to set a trap, to catch her in bed with a man or a woman, or to denounce her when she gave a piece of white bread to a prisoner who was not entitled to it—perhaps out of real pity. The same held good of the Camp Senior, who ruled over all the Hut Seniors. If one of these women was removed from her post, it usually came about for the silliest and pettiest of reasons. Equally ridiculous excuses also served to remove decent prisoners' functionaries, if someone had a grudge against them. Their thrones were rather shaky, and it was often only one step from the Hut Senior's room to the punishment company.

A great many of the clerical posts were occupied by Polish women, while nearly all Instructors and Capos were German prisoners. Finally there were the linen, shoe and tool depots, and the kitchen; in each of them, two, three or more women lived in a small room by themselves, and managed tolerably well, having direct access to valuable goods. All those women had legal, semi-

legal and illegal opportunities to procure what they needed for their existence. Also, they often received extra rations, "death-parcels", etc., from the Camp Command as bonuses. They were the prisoners who could eat their fill and who had the lives of the other prisoners in their hands, through the size of the rations they distributed, through the concession of a second helping of soup or an extra slice of sausage. The difference between the life of an American magnate and that of his youngest messenger-boy cannot be so great as was the difference between the lives of the rank-and-file and of the privileged prisoners. On the other hand, "prominent" prisoners were worse off than the others if they were politically marked persons who had provoked the special ire of the S.S. and whose destruction was desired in higher quarters. But prisoners of this calibre were much rarer among the women than among the men, and there were none among the German women prisoners in Auschwitz.

It is a well-known fact that brothels existed in the men's camps, as the expression of a "progressive" attitude to sexual problems. If my information is correct, there were also brothels for the S.S. in which female prisoners were the inmates. After the liberation by the Allied troops the girls were interrogated. All of them declared they had been forced to enter the brothels or, alternatively, that they had not known they were being sent to a brothel. They lied, unanimously. They knew where they were going, and they went voluntarily, as far as one can speak of anything voluntary in the circumstances. But one has to visualise the situation. They were young, often pretty girls, put to work on road- or dam-building, in the damp and the cold, hungry, frozen, sleeping on paliasses on the ground in their wet clothes during the night, eternally badgered and maltreated during the day. Then Camp Leader Hässler—an S.S. officer who figured in the Belsen trial—lined them up and appealed to them to volunteer for the brothel. There they would have heated rooms to themselves, S.S. food rations, daily baths, silk underwear, decent clothes, walks, no work, cigarettes—and men. Too many men, since every girl in the brothel had to take on six "numbers" per evening. But, all the same, each would be able to have a lover as well. To cap it, they were given a vague promise that they would be released after six months. Among the women in the files there was one who said: "I beg your pardon, Herr Lagerführer; I thought I was going to be trained for work here." The others decided for the brothel. Yet who would say that these girls were not blackmailed into continuing their former profession?

The group of German "anti-social" prisoners comprised not only the prostitutes, who may have deserved the label, but also

women who had "broken a labour contract" by over-staying their holiday or something of the sort, and every shade and type between these working women and the professional tarts. There was, for instance, the young daughter of a factory-owner. When she was called up for national labour service, she somehow wangled it so that she was given home work; she was supposed to make three pairs of uniform trousers per week, at the rate of 3.50 Reichsmark each. She found a tailor's journeyman who did the job for her in his spare time, at 12 Reichsmark per piece. No doubt the German Army got very much better value that way! Her fond father paid the difference out of his pocket, while the daughter went off to a bathing-place with an Air Force officer—until she was found out and sent to the camp.

Then there were poor, defenceless women who had stayed at home from work because it was their washing day or because one of their children was ill—over-burdened creatures forced into slave labour, who had been denounced for repeated absenteeism by malicious Nazi bosses. There were young girls who had gone home without permission because their fiancé or their brother was on leave from the front, and so forth. In an economy without unemployment labour discipline is an intricate problem. There were, in fact, a number of work-shy people among our "anti-social" prisoners. But it is beyond argument that to send these women to a concentration camp for four or five years was no solution of the problem.

When Commandant von Hartenstein came to Auschwitz in the winter of 1943-44 he made a speech in which he said that in his opinion the women had been imprisoned far too long. He would review the files of all the German prisoners and find out whether it was not possible to release the few survivors of the first German transports. He kept his promise. He simply wrote to the local Gestapo which had dealt with those prisoners and asked if the women in question could not be allowed to go home. In most cases the answer was in the affirmative.

The course of events should be imagined more or less as follows: a girl would be a slacker at work in a munitions factory, and would be denounced. Her case would be handled by a young, sharp Gestapo officer who was convinced, by reason of his profession, that concentration camps were educational institutes, and who firmly believed that Germany would win the war within the next three months. Intending to submit the girl to a three months' "education", he would put down "concentration camp for duration" without the slightest qualm. Then he would be transferred, and his successor would take the note on the file at its face value: the Camp Command, theoretically obliged to report on

any "completed education", would not find the time for it. Who was in a position to claim the release of one of those unfortunate women? Their families would have neither the right contacts, nor the money to pay a lawyer with the right contacts. The three months' detention would stretch to three years or more—if the prisoners survived. They were forgotten, buried alive in a camp. It may not have been done intentionally, but I for one found this unintentional cruelty worse than if their ruin had been consciously willed, for whatever insane reason.

One of the girls of that group was stateless. Her release could not be obtained, mainly because she had no proper home parish which could have been approached about her release. After she had been six years in the camp, the Head Wardress once asked her the reason for her detention. She answered: "*Frau Oberaufseherin*, I just can't remember."

Later, such women were labelled "E-prisoners"—E for *Erziehung*, education—and numbered separately, from E₁ to about E_{2,000}. Apparently even the Gestapo had realised that detention for an indefinite term was too much of a good thing. They began to send "E-prisoners" to the camp for a fixed term of three or six months. But often they were not released, because the Camp Command had forgotten to put the date on record, and because no outside agency insisted on it. In any case, three months were sufficient to fall ill with typhus and never to leave this place of education.

Once Dr. Mengele sent for me and asked, in a tone as if he were telling me an astounding piece of news: "Do you realise that there are Lesbian liaisons in your hut?" Of course I did. "Well, and you say 'yes' so indifferently, and do nothing against it?!" I gaped at him. What did he expect me to do? It was always the same old story. Those people did inhuman things, they imprisoned healthy young women for years in surroundings where there was nothing for them to love—no man, no child, no animal, no flower, only an ugliness which in itself was enough to ruin any woman. Then they let their prisoners lie two and three at a time in the same bunk, for months on end, and when the women then clutched at each other, trying to find joy, the S.S. doctor reproached the prisoner-doctor with "not doing anything about it". In their eyes sexual problems did not exist for women, while they somehow acknowledged their existence in the case of the male prisoners, if only by setting up brothels for them. This disregard of facts was all the more astonishing as there were among the female prisoners some with decided traits of pathological sexuality—women who wore men's clothes in the evenings whenever they had an opportunity, and called themselves "Otto" and "Fritz".

A few were even imprisoned because of a sexual abnormality. Nevertheless, most of the Lesbian relationships were the product of circumstances; they occurred rather more frequently in the sick wards, because there the girls had fewer occasions to meet men than while they were working out of doors. It goes without saying that those relationships led to numerous scenes and intrigues.

Lesbian love played a much smaller role in the other national groups than in the German group. It was never clear to me whether this fact was due to a specific tendency, or whether it was simply due to the far longer prison terms of the German women, and to the circumstance that most of them had no ideal which filled them and helped them to sublimate their urges—that they did not feel responsible to anyone for their moral standards.

All this, then, adds up to my picture of the German prisoners in Birkenau Camp. There were among them honest and valuable individuals, women of a certain greatness. They were to be found among the Communists and other anti-Fascists, among those who found themselves in camp almost by accident, among the prostitutes and the other “anti-social” prisoners, and even among the “green” prisoners. But on the whole they were isolated figures. In addition to all their hardships they bore the heavy lot of personal loneliness, even if they found good friends among the prisoners of other nationalities. As a closed group, the German prisoners had a low standard. And precisely as a closed group, without discrimination, the German prisoners were set over the *élite* of European intelligence, over scholars, politicians, fighters, over simple middle-class and working-class women of all the other European nations.

(b) *The Poles*

To write about the members of another national group in the camp, to give a true picture of their real characteristics, if only of those they showed inside the camp, is a difficult task for a German fellow-prisoner. They were all used to considering everybody who spoke German as an enemy, pure and simple. Something of this attitude remained even when they made friends with a German as an individual. In doing so they were never entirely unselfconscious; there was always a feeling about it as though even then they were different amongst themselves. I can only judge about their relations with others as they appeared to an outsider.

When I failed to cope with the German prostitutes in the sick ward, and was sent as doctor to a Polish hut, I found myself in a still more grotesque situation. It was done to punish me, but in

fact it was the patients who were punished. Without understanding a single word of a Slavonic language, I faced 400 sick Polish women with my meagre medical experience. While in the German hut I had tried to do my work as best I could, I now threw up the sponge. I could not communicate with any of the staff, with the exception of a French cleaner and a Slovak nurse who spoke German. There was no point in even attempting to do a real doctor's job. Every afternoon I gathered together the nurses and said, in a questioning tone, the two Polish words I had learnt: "*goraczka?*"—fever—and "*rozwołnienie?*"—diarrhoea. Then I gave each nurse one aspirin tablet for every feverish patient, and one charcoal tablet for every diarrhoea patient. That was all. From time to time I listed all patients who according to the fever graphs had been for some time free of temperature, and dismissed them from the hut. Every day we took in about thirty new patients. After the same searching questions to them, I put down the diagnosis "*influenza*" or "*intestinal catarrh*". Sometimes I would spray out an ear or give a cardiazol injection. Anyhow, no other medicines were available then. The rest of my time I spent getting decent underwear, sheets, blankets and clothes for myself and preparing my meals. And then the amazing thing happened: the Poles declared themselves very pleased with me, and my prestige rose. The Camp Senior even told the S.S. doctor that I was doing well as a doctor in my new ward. Whenever he inspected us and asked for my diagnoses, I would tell him at random something about nephritis and adnex-tumour, in the certainty that he would not check up. The main thing was to give prompt answers; it did not matter what one said, but it was essential not to provoke the suspicion that something was not quite as it should be.

At first I could not conceive why the Polish patients were satisfied with me. Then I began to realise that I looked incredibly sure of myself, precisely because with that sort of diagnosis and therapy I had neither doubts nor problems. This gave the sick women the feeling that they were in good hands and that I would always find a solution. Moreover, they had feared that I, as a German, would treat them tyrannically. Instead, I let them do as they liked, and this suited them. Each patient had her pet theory about her illness, each diagnosed herself and obtained medicaments through private channels whenever she could; and all of them were quite touched because I left them alone and dismissed no more patients than I had to in order to make room for new-comers. As a matter of fact, I did the most reasonable thing I could do in the circumstances, though I was unaware of it: I spared the Poles' self-confidence, which, as a result of centuries of foreign rule, had

been battered and become over-sensitive to a degree not found in any other national group.

Thus I had the reputation among the Poles of being a "very good lady doctor". Strangely, this fact gave me the courage to try again, even in the existing conditions. A few months later, after my attack of typhus, I was sent to another Polish hut, where my good name preceded me. There my position was quite different. In the meantime I had learned some Polish, at least enough to make myself understood in everyday matters and in the most general medical questions. This won the hearts of the Polish women more than anything else. It bothered them that Polish is not one of the universal idioms, and therefore they were touched that I did not force them to speak German with me, but tried to learn their beloved language, if in a rough-and-ready fashion.

Nevertheless, there were some misunderstandings between the Poles and myself. Polish patients who got plenty of parcels from home used to give me many small presents, and I took this as a sign of sympathy. As time went on I found that they did it because they believed it was the thing to do if they wanted to secure my favour. The German officials in their country had accustomed them to it. I was able to stop it as far as I was concerned. Once, when a Polish girl with enteric typhoid fever offered me a whole sausage—our hygienic conditions were such that it did not seem strange to accept food from people with typhoid fever!—I took it with the words: "Listen. If you give it me out of friendliness, I'm very grateful for it. But if you think it will prevent me from moving you to the 'infectious' hut, which all of you try to avoid, then you are making a bad investment." The girl left me the sausage, and I transferred her all the same. When the news of my attitude had circulated, I got somewhat fewer presents, but those I did get were probably given out of a genuine impulse.

Once one succeeded in overcoming the hatred and distrust of the Polish women for anyone speaking German—to be fair, their justified hatred and distrust!—and once one convinced them that one was on their side, their cordiality and hospitality were boundless.

The Poles found it most difficult of all to bear the bondage of foreign intruders in their homeland; in addition they bore the infinitely more dreadful oppression in the concentration camp, and on top of it the subordination to other prisoners, particularly the Germans. Next to the Jews the Poles were the biggest national group in the camp. As most of them were physically strong, received more food from home than anybody else, were not threatened by gassing (at least not after 1943) and lived in a closely-knit community, there existed a number of veteran Polish prisoners

who had gone through typhus and made a good recovery. These women held good, influential positions in the camp administration; they were intelligent, energetic and straight: they thought it their right to lead the camp. For them Auschwitz—under its Polish name Oswiecim—was *the* Polish camp, the place which existed for the extermination of the Polish intelligentsia, a great number of the Polish aristocrats, and all the resistance fighters. For these reasons the Polish women believed that they had a first claim to the influential positions in the camp; above all, to the posts in which they would have been able to help, place, protect and cover up other compatriots. They could not do anything against the German functionaries who were backed by the S.S., and they had not many conflicts with the smaller groups—the French, the Yugoslavs, etc. But they did get into conflicts with the Jews. I shall have more to say about this later.

The great strength of the Polish group was its structure. The anti-social elements were an insignificant percentage. There were a good many non-political women who had come to the camp more or less accidentally, because they were picked up during a police raid, or in connection with the black market, or because they had left their place of work, etc. Yet these “accidents” mostly had something to do with the national consciousness, the struggle for freedom, the self-defence of the Polish people. There was, for instance, a little dressmaker. While she was delivering a dress, the family of her customer was arrested by the Gestapo, and she was taken along with them. She had done nothing and was completely innocent of politics, but when she was offered her immediate release if she signed the “German Nationals List” she refused and was sent to the camp. The number of those imprisoned for a mere nothing—and of those who died in camp for it—was legion. They were there because they had once spoken to a Partisan, or because they were relatives of politically active Poles, or quite simply because they were Polish.

Near Poznan two Germans happened to die very soon after their admission to a hospital; they had died from two different, rare illnesses, but the German authorities assumed that they had been killed by Polish doctors, and arrested fifteen Poznan doctors, men and women. The demand for an exhumation and post-mortem of the two bodies was rejected, and the Poznan doctors were sent to Auschwitz Camp. This is one example out of very many.

Those Poles who had been non-political before their arrest were educated to political consciousness through their detention, through the camp, and through the guidance of the many active fighters of the Polish Resistance—those innumerable Polish

political prisoners whose spirit and courage were to be broken in the camp but only grew in strength as long as they stood the strain physically.

I had many conversations about politics with Polish fellow-prisoners, in German or French, and later also in broken Polish. I tried to learn and understand their ideas. Whether it was a residue of distrust which made them cautious towards me, though they liked me well enough, or whether there were other reasons, I never really found out. Again and again I asked them the obvious questions. Before the war, Poland had had two possibilities—that of ranging herself with Hitler against Russia, and that of ranging herself with Russia against Hitler. Either would have been feasible in itself. Why did Poland accept the German gift of the Olsaland in 1938 and refuse the Russians the right to march through its territory in the protection of Czechoslovakia? On the other hand, why did not Poland let Hitler march to the Russian frontier in 1939, if that was to be the line of policy? The answer to these questions was: "But we couldn't have allowed a foreign army on Polish soil!" The women who said this prayed for the Russian advance, they fell on each other's necks when they heard that the Russians had crossed the Polish frontier and occupied the first Polish towns—towns turned into ruins and rubble by the alternating advance and retreat of the Russians and Germans. Could they not have got the same result with less sacrifices? I asked them: "In 1938, Poland was a solid State which could have confronted and matched the Russian army with its own strong armed forces and its own intact national life. At that time you did not want it. Now, when you cannot have it like this, you call in the Russians. What was your idea at the time?" I never got a satisfactory explanation. It seemed to me that the majority of the Polish women in the camp were patriots without also being politically mature.

Sometimes when I took part in one of their festivities I saw their exuberant optimism and their firm conviction that a free Poland would rise again. I saw their faith binding them together in a genuine, close national community, and the idea "Poland" filling them so exclusively that it left them no urge to give that idea a positive, social content. I saw that nothing beyond the social reality, nothing which would have been a significant mental reality, separated the land-worker from the land-owner and aristocrat, or the factory-worker from the banker's wife. And, seeing all that, I sometimes felt the deepest sympathy for those unfortunate people, together with a regretful sadness when I imagined the future life of many of these women. Now that the implacable reality of class conflicts is again to the fore, a great number may

be imprisoned in yet another camp. Do they still have their faith? Among the Polish prisoners there were hardly any Socialists or Communists. Were they all Fascists? Certainly not, in the sense in which we learned to know and hate Fascism in Central Europe. But they were open to Fascist ideology through their anti-Semitism and through the lack of clarity in their political programmes. Yet their unquestioning patriotism, their ardent love for their unhappy country, were admirable. And the recklessness, the courage and the temperament they brought to its defence were matchless.

The same temperament, however, made it far from easy to live together with them in the narrow confines of the camp. The recklessness that inspired their resolute rejection of camp rules was refreshing and encouraging, but it created problems which made the position of all prisoner-functionaries much more difficult. I recall the agricultural working party quartered in Babice. Most of the prisoners were Polish. Every evening some quite decent soup was cooked in a cauldron in the courtyard. We formed up for the roll-call, were counted, and had to turn left and file past the soup-cauldron to get our rations. On every single evening during the eight weeks I was at Babice all the 180 prisoners hurled themselves at the cauldron as soon as the whistle sounded the end of the roll-call. The result was invariably that the prisoners in charge of the distribution of the soup had no room to do it, refused to lift the cover from the cauldron, and ended by pushing back the throng more or less rudely. Then the ranks were laboriously formed again and the women filed past. But no persuasion and no shouting could ever prevent the first mass assault, though this outlying working party suffered much less from hunger than the prisoners inside the camp itself. Of course it was particularly unwise to post German prisoners to the "room service" which included the distribution of the soup. Or, if the idea was to foster dissension in the prisoners' ranks, it was particularly wise. It was these things, not world politics, round which life in the camp revolved.

(c) *The Russians*

Though the Russian group was smaller than the Polish, it was numerically strong. Within it there were two sectors: the land-workers, or sometimes factory-workers, who had run away from their place of work in Germany, and the active Communists, partisans and women members of the Red Army. We had waited with curiosity for the latter, who were sent to Auschwitz in appreciable numbers only after the beginning of 1944. On the whole they made a very good impression. They had great

national pride; their Communist convictions were deep-rooted and genuine, neither forced nor grafted on to them. They stuck together, and did not take much part in the general fight for "positions", which was a relief. It was true that they could afford this detachment better than other prisoners, because getting easy jobs was not vital for them. They were physically so much stronger than the others that they stood the camp life even if they had to do strenuous work.

In my early days in camp I had to help to carry the heavy cast-iron soup cauldron. Four of us would labour at it, make hardly any progress on the bad road, and have to put it down every ten yards or so; when we arrived we were completely exhausted. Occasionally we gave some of the bread we had saved to Russian prisoners and asked them to help us. Two of them would take the cauldron and spring along the whole length of the camp road, from the kitchen to the hospital, at a pace which made it difficult for us to follow, though our hands were empty. Then they would laugh at us, showing their magnificent teeth, and we could only shake our heads in wonder.

The Russian prisoners suffered much less from illnesses than the others, and if they fell ill they quickly recovered. When they wanted to exert themselves they could do twice as much work as Poles, Czechs or Yugoslavs, three times as much as the Germans, four times as much as the French or Jewish women, with the exception of the Slovakian Jewesses. At one time a few Russian girls had a good chance of getting out of the camp. Commandant von Hartenstein took our hospital runner—charming little Sonya, an ardent Communist—into his house as a nursery maid. Later he arranged it so that his relatives and friends, too, could take strong Russian girls as domestic servants; they were released from the camp, but had to do compulsory labour service. Sonya often pushed the pram past the electrified wire outside the camp precincts. Once when she was alone with the children and the elder ones did not obey her she made them stand for two hours outside the front door of their house. When the Commandant came home and asked her in high dudgeon what she thought she was doing, Sonya answered that this was the "punishment by standing" which she had learned in the camp. After this the Commandant preferred to send her away, but he was decent enough not to put her back into the camp. He passed her on to friends—they could cope with her!

I often worked with young Russian women doctors, and found them very devoted to patients, of whatever nationality. The Russian surgeon was perhaps the only one amongst us who was capable of preserving all the time a deep personal interest in her

patients, so that she would still cry whenever a sick woman died despite her efforts. Our Russian colleagues were very willing to learn from others and to try new methods. But I was sometimes rather frightened by their indiscriminate use of these new methods, and by their quick satisfaction with a diagnosis, which made them launch forth on a treatment without further check by continued observation and reflection. Once a young Russian woman doctor deputed in my ward for a week during my absence. When I came back she told me, beaming with pride, that she had given sulphonamides to all patients suffering from diarrhoea. We had just begun to experiment with a sulphonamide treatment of intestinal catarrhs, and she had been eager to test its results. I was startled when I heard that she had given the stuff to every single one of the diarrhoea patients, and I must have looked uneasy, which she seemed to take for medical conservatism or even professional jealousy. But among my patients there was one who suffered from a bad nephritis and had diarrhoea which was not caused by infection but by uræmia; unfortunately she, too, had been given sulphonamides which strained still more her failing kidneys, and it turned out that her state of health had considerably deteriorated in consequence.

This is not meant to indicate that my medical knowledge was greater and that I was therefore better able to foresee the consequences—my Russian colleague knew quite as much as I did. But there was a difference in our approach, in the importance each of us gave to the exception that did not conform to the pattern. She had argued: "Out of ninety-five patients with heavy diarrhoea who have been treated for three days with maximum doses of sulphonamides, fifty can be considered cured, twenty-five improved; fifteen did not respond to the treatment; five have grown worse." Success with seventy-five patients had so pleased, and indeed dazzled her, that the failure with five patients appeared a negligible quantity to her. I, on the contrary, was specially interested in those five, and under certain conditions might even find them more important than the seventy-five, for medical or for human reasons.

She was not in the least offended when I explained the reason for my frown, but was immediately ready to see her mistake and to learn gratefully from it. It was their open-mindedness with people of whose esteem and affection they could feel sure that made our Russian colleagues such exemplary collaborators and comrades.

Among this group of real Russian Communists some were highly cultured women who had not lost a scrap of their freshness and sanity through their intellectualism. But between them and the Russian slave workers was a deep gulf. Those labour slaves

had been dragged to Germany by the Wehrmacht and S.S., and had run away from their forced work in despair, out of homesickness—only to run straight into the arms of the police and the concentration camp. Most of them came from the Ukraine. They were incredibly primitive, and could not understand what had happened to them. Their discipline in the camp was far greater than that of, say, the Polish women. It was obvious that they were used to life in a collective; they were less self-opinionated and also less independent than the Poles. Occasionally one of them would have utterly unexpected outbursts of mad rage, in which she would knock down one or two wardresses and could be restrained only with the greatest difficulty. While I worked in the “convalescence ward”, which was also used as a ward for mental diseases, a relatively large number of Russian women were brought in as mentally deranged.

This is perhaps the right place for a few general observations on mental diseases in the camp. Apart from the Russians, most psychopathic patients continued to suffer from the psychoses from which they had already suffered while at liberty. In many cases their illness and the anti-social actions connected with it (particularly at the beginning of new phases and in the initial stage of the illness) had been the cause of their arrest, because they were misinterpreted as “undisciplined conduct”. I observed no case of insanity which was provoked or determined by the conditions of the camp. Above all, there was hardly more genuine hysteria inside the camp than is to be found outside. On the contrary, the effect of the camp—as of other exceptional situations—on neurotics who may have been failures in normal life was not adverse, despite the suppressed or abnormal sexual life they had to lead. Real psychoses caused by the camp were only the toxic psychoses following on typhus, which I have already mentioned. However, 80 per cent. of the women suffered from amenorrhœa—cessation of the menses. This was partly caused by the general weakening of the organism and the insufficient, or at the best badly balanced, nutrition. But there were psychological factors as well. I saw this particularly clearly in the case of a young girl who had lived under comparatively good conditions in the camp. She had had no menstruation since the day of her arrest, and it came back on the day when, after three years’ detention, she was told she would be released.

Russian women were the relatively largest contingent of mental patients, but I always had a vague, uncomfortable feeling that amongst them were women who were locked up without being insane. While I had to tackle single-handed 700 patients, I was physically incapable of checking these cases. When things

got easier I subjected them, with the help of interpreters, to an admittedly superficial psychiatric examination. It proved very difficult, among other reasons because most of them took me for a Gestapo official. The examination showed that several of the Russians were not really deranged. On being questioned about their domestic affairs, their farms, their villages, the work they did there, they gave perfectly clear answers, and their accounts were detailed and consistent. Outside their homes they had lost their orientation in time and space. "Then the war came" (some of them were not very clear about this either—at least, they did not know who was fighting whom) "and your boys took us along." What had followed then had confused them utterly: work in a foreign town, among people whose language they could not understand, in a factory, or even on a farm where methods and implements were strange to them, not enough to eat—and they had only one thought: home! Without preparation, without food for the journey, without the slightest idea of the route, they simply took to the road, towards the east. Sometimes I asked them how they had planned to get through the German front lines. They had not planned anything, they had just walked on until the police caught them and took them to the concentration camp. Asked where they now were, they said hesitatingly: "*Lager . . .*"—camp—and one could see in their faces that this strange compound was an insoluble riddle to them. Once Dr. Koenig spoke with a Russian woman who could not be called mentally deranged, though she may have had a schizoid tendency. He asked her where she was and why she was here. In broken German she said: "I worked so hard with the farmer, then the police came and took me here for a rest." Her answer silenced the S.S. Doctor completely.

Women of this type were naturally incapable of fitting into the camp and adjusting themselves to its conditions. They insisted on their human rights, came into conflict with every authority in the camp, and were so impervious to persuasion that they were judged "not quite normal". Then they were locked up with violent schizophrenics and maniacs.

Once a sixteen-year-old Russian girl walked with the greatest ease through the camp gates, which happened to be open, and by an oversight slipped past the control. A hundred yards farther on an S.S. sentry stopped her and asked where she was going. She answered candidly, "*Do domu*,"—home—as if it were the most natural thing in the world. Not even our powers-that-be could bring themselves to treat this as an attempt to escape, so she was sent to my ward as a "lunatic"—while she had only the natural gravity of a child in a world that had gone mad.

(d) *The Jews*

It is not so very long since the gas chambers ceased their work, and it is still a frightening undertaking to write about the Jews in Auschwitz Camp. Any word of respect and awe sounds trite in the face of the physical and spiritual tortures suffered by their people in the Death Camp. Any word of criticism sounds sacrilegious. The description of the selections and the transports to the gas chambers explains everything. Human beings who have this fate constantly before their eyes, as an immediate menace to every individual, live under conditions so abnormal that it is almost pointless to subject their behaviour to an analysis.

Yet Jewish women and men did escape death through gas, illness or maltreatment; they survived even the camps in which Jewry was to be exterminated. How was it possible? What kind of people were they? How did they live together with the "Aryan" prisoners?

Among the Jewish prisoners the best and the worst survived. There was a negative and a positive selection of the "fittest". The women who survived either had a tremendous vitality, the greatest moral, intellectual and physical strength and capacity, or they were capable of the crudest and cruellest brutality against anybody and everybody, including their fellow-prisoners. Of the second class, some were unbelievably callous and untouched by the terrible suffering of the others. They had saved their own lives, they held acceptable positions—nothing else counted. They maintained themselves in their functions, were strong, hardened and ruthless, and had armoured themselves against a compassion which might otherwise have destroyed them. One sometimes wondered how those people could go on living, with the smoking chimney before their eyes, forever threatened by the fate which had overtaken those burning bodies.

As the solitary hunted creature felt the threat come nearer to her and had to fight more strenuously, day after day, to stave it off, she would consider it increasingly as a personal, individual fate which she tried to evade, and would become more and more indifferent to the anguish of others. There were women who, when the menace had passed them by once again, and they could feel safe until the next selection, breathed with relief and appeared undisturbed by the death of the others. I often thought that I and my friends were more horrified and shaken by the mass murder of the Jews than the Jewish women who had been able to survive. This was perhaps the most frightening thing of all, though a closer examination makes it seem comprehensible, even inevitable.

Auschwitz was a stage of the greatest tragedy of the Jewish people, the cruellest and most extensive persecution of their race

in history. But the number of Jews who saw it there and then as the catastrophe of their race was relatively small. For the majority it meant above all a struggle for their own individual survival; otherwise they were pre-occupied only with their nearest relatives and friends. As the survival of a Jewess in Auschwitz was twice as improbable as the survival of a non-Jewish prisoner (improbable as this was, too), the Jewish prisoner's whole mind was filled with the struggle for mere personal existence. Therefore the Jews in the camp were much less of a united group than people of other nationalities.

Ena Weiss, our Chief Doctor—one of the most intelligent, gifted and eminent Jewish women in the camp—once defined her attitude thus, in sarcastic rejection of fulsome flattery and at the same time with brutal frankness: "How did I keep alive in Auschwitz? My principle is: myself first, second and third. Then nothing. Then myself again—and then all the others." This formula expressed the only principle which was possible for Jews who intended—almost insanely intended—to survive Auschwitz. Yet, because this woman had the icy wisdom and strength to accept the principle, she kept for herself a position in which she could do something for the Jews. Hardly anybody else in the camp did as much for them and saved so many lives as she did.

The Jews who felt safest in their positions, and were least threatened otherwise, suffered most deeply through the suffering and destruction of their people; they no longer fought for their personal survival, but for the rescue of small groups of Jews who would have the mission of creating another, happier Jewish nation. These women, too, appeared calm, almost impassive and frozen when hell was let loose in the selections; but it was cold, harnessed hate and absolute determination which made them seem so. They felt the two-thousand-year-old suffering of their race too deeply to show their feelings.

Thus the Jewish women with extreme qualities either way were those who survived, and these were the qualities which were accentuated in the camp. That this peculiar selection and accentuation was a product of enormous pressure, not only on their lives within the camp, but also outside and before it, was proved by the fact that it was far less noticeable amongst the Jews who belonged to a country which had absorbed them as equal citizens. The French, Yugoslav and Czech Jewesses were first and foremost Frenchwomen, Yugoslavs or Czechs, and also human beings of every sort and kind, gifted and dull, loud and quiet, outstanding and mediocre. They felt sheltered amongst their compatriots, and behaved infinitely more freely and naturally than the other Jewish women.

The German Jews were the most unhappy, and therefore those who had least psychological power of resistance in the camp. Here it must be remembered that the strongest and most active of the German Jews had emigrated in the years between 1933 and 1939. Those who stayed on were practically without contact with the anti-Fascist movements of their country. They had been enslaved and kicked, humiliated and half-starved longer than the others. They were without energy, they were weary unto death. And in their stubbornness, their fanatical love for work, and their shattering respect for uniforms, they were very "German".

While I worked in the Polish hut (or rather, as I have mentioned, did not work to begin with), I also had to look after a sick-bay for doctors and nurses. There I had German doctors who had just arrived with a transport from Breslau bringing some of the last Jewish women out of Germany. Though at the time I thought it impossible to achieve anything worth while in the enormous Polish ward, I did my level best to save these few Jewish women. Everything failed. It was a hopeless undertaking to attempt to pull them out of their utter pessimism and despair. They were dead in spirit before they died. Of the twenty-five patients in the room for whom I had fought with all my energy, only two weak young girls survived. Both were gassed in the following year.

In the summer of 1944 I met a German-Jewish colleague who had had the strength to stand the camp, although she was not one of the youngest. She had survived the typhus epidemic—in the gypsy camp, with the heaviest odds against her—and when that camp was liquidated she took up work in our hospital. We became fast friends, and our friendship still lasts. She is a wonderful physician, and I owe to her everything I learned in the camp in the medical field. The Nazis had allowed her to go on working at the Robert Koch Institute in Berlin till 1938 and to attend scientific congresses—and in the end she, too, landed in Auschwitz.

I saw several times how, with her touchingly correct attitude, she was totally incapable of arranging her own food, clothing and billet as the camp necessitated. A little incident is characteristic. A cart loaded with cabbages—a much-desired food, since we were all hungry for vitamins—drove up the camp road, and at a bend a lot of the cabbages fell to the ground. All the prisoners who happened to be near threw themselves on them, each trying to get a cabbage for herself. One cabbage rolled to my friend's feet. Instead of picking it up quickly, she asked a wardress who was standing near: "May I take one, too?" For once she was lucky; the wardress was not inhuman, and answered: "You can take it,

but you shouldn't ask." In the beginning I was able to help her a little; later a Jewish Hut Senior looked after her.

Now I had at least a human being with whom I could discuss, in my mother tongue, the matters that occupied me, a colleague who even in the camp had a scientific interest in medicine and whom I could consult on other questions than "What should I give that patient?"

The first step was to cover myself. I asked the camp doctor officially if he would authorise me to employ the Jewish doctor as a consultant specialist in the German ward. Sometimes when one made an impersonal request to S.S. men of Dr. Koenig's type, taking the same impersonal objectivity for granted on their side, they would forget about their ideology and decide on merit. The S.S. doctor had an interest in the good medical treatment of the few surviving German prisoners; he realised that such a treatment was more likely if this eminent doctor took part in it than if I was alone. He gave his permission. After this I made a list twice a week of the more interesting cases in my hut, and asked my friend to look at them and discuss them with me. Sometimes she gave me concise little lectures on a certain subject, such as the treatment of cardiac insufficiencies. I believe we felt in those hours rather like Socrates and Criton. We almost forgot where we were—and it restored to me a belief in the meaning of our profession.

Dr. Koenig, who was quite a shrewd psychologist, soon found out what an asset she was. His rival, Dr. Mengele, had just paraded his research work in the concentration camp before a commission of doctors from Berlin, who were supposed to study the sanitary conditions in our camp. He had exhibited a family of dwarfs—circus people whom he had specially saved from gassing and investigated anthropologically. This zeal had earned him great praise, upon which he presented each of the midgets with a thick slice of sausage. This affair spurred Dr. Koenig to demonstrate his talents. He asked my colleague to write a monograph on the changes of reaction to certain blood tests among concentration camp prisoners: he would publish it under his own name. At first I remonstrated with her—why should she lend herself to it? why should she let him boast with her intellectual products? She answered serenely: "I've published quite enough in my life; I can afford to cede him this piece of research plus the kudos. I'm happy that I can do scientific work again. Also, I'll be able to help my test cases. As long as I need them for my research they are safe from selections, and I can even prescribe supplementary food for them." I saw the force of her argument.

A few days later we were standing near a patient's bed, im-

mersed in our discussion, when a runner came to tell my colleague that the camp doctor had sent for her. Apparently he wanted to inquire about the progress of "his" work. She started brusquely, broke off our conversation, smoothed her hair, buttoned up her white overall, and was about to run off, when I boiled over. "Why are you in such a hurry? Do you think the man won't wait? Is it you who want something from him, or he who wants something from you?" She looked somewhat astonished at my gruff, almost scolding tone, but then she realised what I had meant. It was not that I expressed scorn at her "slavish behaviour", as the Nazi term has it. How could I have felt scornful in Auschwitz Camp? Only—my reverence for this woman made it seem intolerable to me that she should have accepted the reversal of the natural order, by which the callow camp doctor was her boss, though he was not worth her little finger, and that she should recognise his arrogant authority.

To me this seemed a far-reaching matter. At that moment my friend and colleague was in no personal danger. She was no longer hungry, dirty and exhausted. She knew that in this particular situation he depended on her, not she on him. But she had lost the faculty of seizing and exploiting this circumstance to restore the violated natural order, at least for a few moments and within her small orbit. She had capitulated before the uniform—and this was what I used to call the passive contribution to the monstrosity of the concentration camps. I must stress that I am not speaking of the passive submission, but of the contribution of the prisoners, without which much would have been impossible, or at least impossible in that form. The terror had its after-effect even when its pre-conditions no longer existed. The whole German people, and the German Jews as well, since they were German, had succumbed to it. This was the thing against which I tried to fight with every fibre of my being.

And my friend did not take offence at my reproach. I think she was glad that I had made it.

The German Jews were also utterly German in their great intellectual culture, by which they embodied Germany's best traditions before Hitler. But some of them had gone oddly astray. Once I was talking to a prisoner, a Jew from Berlin, and said with a sigh, imagining this post-war Germany: "I really don't know what I want to happen." He answered proudly: "What I want is a German victory, because if Germany is defeated it means the destruction of the whole of Frederick the Great's conception." I stared at him as if he were the eighth wonder of the world. Admittedly, this man had been a member of the "League of German Citizens of Jewish Denomination" and was intensely proud of

having an "Aryan" brother-in-law who was a high official in Pomerania.

Among the Jewish prisoners from other countries the most exotic were the Greek Jewesses, who mostly came from Salonika. There were girls of a fairy-tale beauty, delicately made, like deer, with tiny feet and enormous dark eyes. They arrived in Auschwitz in March, 1943, trembling with cold and fear. A few months later nearly all of them were dead. A few in privileged positions survived, but as a group they never played the slightest role in the camp.

By contrast, the Jewish women from Slovakia were the most robust. A thousand of them—the first Jewish prisoners—had come to the camp the day after the arrival of the first batch of 1,000 German women from Ravensbrück Camp. They were told that they would "work in Germany": the work waiting for them was the setting up of the women's concentration camp at Birkenau. Precisely because they were the first-comers, the Slovaks held some of the key positions in the camp. Their resilience and stamina were amazing. The majority of them were exceptionally strong and healthy, thus giving the lie to the racial theories of "Jewish degeneracy". There were girls among them who lived through a typhus attack without staying in bed. Two of their friends would take the sick comrade between them, when she had a temperature of 103° F. and saw everything as a blur, and drag her along with their labour gang; out in the fields they would lay her down under a shrub, and in the evening they would march her back to camp—all to avoid her being sent to the hospital hut and so being exposed to the danger of a selection. The Slovaks would keep on their feet during a roll-call even when they suffered from frightful abscesses or phlegmons and could scarcely breathe with pain. A very great number of them died, but those who survived were proof against anything. They were all experts in "camp technique"; though they had no parcels from home—which made things more difficult for them than for the Poles—they knew how to get hold of food and clothing, and looked healthy and spruce, some even elegant. And, in the camp, one's appearance was very important. Not every one of them did it by clean methods—that is to say, by getting the things from friends working in the various depots—but somehow they all managed.

The two "queens" of the camp, the roll-clerk and the Chief Doctor of our hospital, were Jewesses from Slovakia. Both were exceptionally good-looking, clever, gifted and decent. Both used their position to help all prisoners, with the greatest fairness, although they naturally helped first of all the Jewish prisoners who needed protection and aid most urgently. I had not much to

do with Katya, the roll-clerk, and had little direct knowledge of her work, but on the other hand I was able to observe the conduct of our Chief Doctor, Ena Weiss, in close detail.

The most striking thing about this woman, who was not yet thirty, was the ice-cold self-control by which she hid her abysmal hatred of the German rulers. Her self-confidence was so complete that she never felt a second's vacillation in dealing with the highest S.S. officers. She kept them at bay by letting them feel her disdain in a perfectly courteous manner. The way in which she made those S.S. people depend on her, until they were convinced that without her the whole thing would break down, amounted to genius. She even made them publicly rebuke anti-Semitic remarks by refractory German prisoners.

Yet her methods, completely comprehensible from the point of view of the Jewish prisoners' interests, were sometimes questionable from the point of view of the sick in general. This led to certain conflicts with the non-Jewish prisoners, particularly the Poles.

The prisoner-doctors could follow one of two methods in their dealings with the S.S. doctors. The first was to appeal again and again to a vestige of objectivity, comprehension and humanity in them, despite everything and despite the inevitable discouragement. It meant insisting continually that things could not go on as they were, and so wresting infinitesimal concessions and improvements from them. But tactics of this sort involved a great danger: it could lead to an increase in the slaughter of Jewish prisoners. If we complained that there were not enough beds in the hospital, it implied that there were too many patients. Their number would have to be reduced—and we knew what that meant. If there was not enough medicine we had to keep silent about it, because otherwise we should have been ordered to give no medicine at all to Jewish patients. In other words, it was in the interest of the Jewish patients to follow the second method—that of hiding the worst defects, glossing over them, and assuring the camp doctor that everything was in order. This put off the danger of new selections. But the non-Jewish patients were interested in getting things remedied. It was an insoluble dilemma.

Again and again Ena Weiss maintained that it was senseless to point out the deficiencies of the hospital; the S.S. did not care, anyhow, and it was best for us to keep silent and procure everything through underground channels. This, however, had the effect that, whenever we raised a justified complaint we were told: "Now, what's this? You said yourselves that everything was in order!"

A similar problem arose about positions which offered a certain degree of safety and the chance of better living conditions; in the

camp hospital these were mainly the posts on the nursing staff. The Jewish prisoners wanted to get in as many as possible of their own people, who would then be safe from selections. The patients in general wanted to get nurses who were strong and used to hard work; women of this kind were to be found in the first place among the Poles, if only because most of them got plenty of food parcels from home. Then the Poles argued: "Oswiecim is in Poland; it is the camp of the Polish intelligentsia and the Polish Resistance Movement—we want to rule it." The Jews argued: "They have taken everything from us—family, home, liberty, property—we were promised a 'closed area' for our settlement. Auschwitz is only too 'closed'—it is no more than a few square miles—we want to have at least this space for ourselves."

How to overcome these contradictions? A Polish woman doctor, a magnificent person of the highest ethical principles, worked in the children's sick ward. When the number of the nurses in the hut was to be reduced she was asked whom she would miss least. The choice was between dismissing a Jewish or a Polish nurse. The doctor told me: "I thought to myself, the Pole is a strong girl, she will get on even outside the hospital, but if I dismiss the Jewish girl, she will be lost." She kept the Jewish nurse, although she was rather less competent than the other. But not all non-Jewish prisoners proceeded on the same principle, in the first place not all the Poles. Nor were all of them in a position to do so. As far as I could judge the Polish population by our Poles in the camp, anti-Semitism had extremely deep roots among them.

The difference between a Polish and a Jewish-Polish woman in looks, behaviour and idiom was very great and immediately obvious. In contrast, it was impossible to distinguish between a French Jewess and a non-Jewish Frenchwoman, unless one spotted the star of the Jewish badge. It was the age-old problem of the assimilation of the Jews. Lack of assimilation was not made less conspicuous, but, on the contrary, it was accentuated, by the pressure which weighed upon all of us in the camp. Moreover, the "negative selection" to which I have referred was most noticeable among the Polish-Jewish prisoners, who therefore represented the greatest problem.

I asked the Polish doctor who had decided with such fairness in the question of the two nurses whether she was an anti-Semite like the others. She said: "Not in the sickening sense in which it is practised here—in the camp, every decent person must be philo-Semitic. But I don't like the Jews; they have never been loyal to Poland, they have betrayed us to the Russians or to the Germans and they've worked together with both against us."

The problem of the Jewish women doctors was particularly

difficult. If a woman prisoner on arriving in the camp claimed to be a doctor, she was neither asked to show her papers (which she would not have had with her in any case) nor was her medical knowledge subjected to any test. Now, for a Jew to be a doctor meant to be protected from the gas chamber. Who would have dared to blame one of them if she pretended to be a doctor, when in fact she was a nurse? But there was another side to the question. The prisoners wanted to be sure of good medical treatment, for themselves and their comrades. What attitude were they to take towards those sham doctors?

I began my work in the camp as a convinced internationalist. I ended by considering it the wisest course, in the given circumstances, to have each national group treated by doctors who were their compatriots. Otherwise it seemed to me impossible to create the necessary confidence between doctor and patient. There were, of course, a few outstanding exceptions.

Here is an example of what would happen. Some Polish children in quarantine before leaving the camp got whooping cough. Their nurses were Polish. The camp doctor—for once sincerely concerned about the children's welfare, as they were to be sent home—selected for their treatment the best doctor in the whole camp hospital, the Berlin Jewess mentioned before. Now, it so happens that the German medical school treats whooping cough with as few drugs as possible as long as there are no complications, while the Polish school prescribes plenty of them as a prophylactic measure against complications. This is in itself a professional question, which can be discussed impersonally. In our case the doctor kept the children under careful observation, but did not prescribe anything. The Polish nurses were convinced that she was either incompetent or bent on giving the wrong treatment to the children because they were Polish. Behind her back they called in a Polish doctor. The German Jewess, whose great knowledge and professional ethics were above argument, was rightly indignant at the distrust of the Poles, while they in their turn felt that they had saved the Polish children by their timely intervention. Anyone who tried to explain and mediate was lost: both camps would accuse the mediator of not being impartial.

It is an ugly thing to say, but the decisive factor in the relationship between Jews and non-Jews was the attitude of the S.S. It could make their joint existence more or less tolerable.

On the whole, the more reasonable among us always succeeded in keeping a balance between the opposing interests, in distributing positions relatively fairly, according to capacity and need, and in settling differences pacifically. But the situation rapidly deteriorated when the most brutal anti-Semite among the S.S.

doctors, Dr. Klein, later of Belsen, was put in charge of our hospital. At once a group of violent anti-Semites among the Poles began to intrigue against what they termed the "Jewish régime in the hospital", while the Jewish women defended themselves and fought for their lives with every means at their disposal. People who up till then had been good friends and collaborators began to quarrel. In our doctors' room, for instance, we were four Poles, a Czech Jewess and an Austrian, and we had been a closely united group. Then anti-Semitism flared up, ugly remarks were made, resentments were created, the atmosphere became oppressive, and in the end we were glad when we separated.

I knew Jewish men and women of a nobility of mind which would seem mythical to anyone who had not experienced it. There were those who, when I offered them my help in Vienna, said: "No, I can't accept that—I could never be responsible for bringing danger upon you," and started their journey to Poland, and their death, with their heads held high. There were men who, seeing the pogroms, said: "If there are persecutors and persecuted, I prefer to be among the victims." In Auschwitz I met a young woman doctor who could have stayed on the staff of a Jewish hospital in comparative freedom. She explained: "My sister-in-law was listed for transport to Auschwitz. She was making my brother very happy, and I am fond of him. So I left her my papers and took her place." I saw starving Jews who shared their last piece of bread with other hungry prisoners. I saw hunted Jews who never spoke of revenge, but always remained fair and just.

But I also had some bad disappointments: typically, they occurred at the time when anti-Semitism in its vilest form showed itself even among the inmates of the camp. Without generalising and without attaching too much importance to personal experiences, I want to record two incidents. For somehow these experiences then seemed symptomatic to me, and in the last analysis the attitude of the individual, and therefore that of the mass as well, is influenced far more by such personal experiences than by general reflections.

One of my disappointing experiences was a ridiculous and petty affair. I had given some knitting wool to a Jewish colleague; a patient in her hut was going to knit me a cardigan. Three weeks later I went to inquire about it. My colleague said, deeply depressed: "There was a selection here yesterday; they took away all my patients—for gassing—and cleared out all the things in the hut, including your cardigan, which was practically finished." Of course I said nothing. With a shudder, I walked through the empty hut where only the day before human beings had

breathed, and trembled. Some weeks later I saw my colleague again—she was wearing the cardigan. It was so silly; in the meantime I had got myself another jacket and had completely forgotten about the cardigan. But I felt ashamed for this woman, who at that time lived a life of no particular hardship and had no need to make a stupid little deal out of the other's tragedy. And I had no inner defence against the scornful smile of the young Pole who had deliberately driven this Jewish doctor from our room by being nasty to her, while I had opposed it. I was reduced to the argument that our colleague might—might!—not have behaved as she did had she stayed with us. Possibly she wanted to take her revenge, and I was the only possible object, the only one whom she could hurt; for anything she could have done to the Pole would only have strengthened the latter's anti-Semitic convictions, and would not have hurt her.

The second incident hit me much more deeply. It made me feel the ineradicable distrust against me, because I was "a German".

For our Chief Doctor I felt admiration, sympathy and gratitude. She had looked after me during my attack of typhus and had saved my life. When I came to the camp, as the only German woman doctor, my mere existence implied a danger to her position; in spite of this, she received me with perfect comradeship. Also, she soon realised that I had not the slightest intention of ousting her from her job. At the beginning I found it so difficult to get my bearings that I would not have felt up to any greater task such as hers. Later I did not want to be Chief Doctor, because it would have brought me nothing but disadvantages. It would have been intolerable for me to have to go round with the S.S. doctors the whole day long and be present at the selections, when the victims would have thought that I, with my German badge, had an active role in them. As the Chief Doctor's work had nothing to do with the direct treatment of patients, my medical work would have become much less interesting. I had every interest in staying in my ward and leaving the existing state of affairs as it was.

Then came Dr. Klein; and the Poles, for whom he had a predilection, tried to persuade him to make me Chief Doctor instead of the "Jewess". I made it perfectly clear to everybody that I would never lend myself to an anti-Semitic intrigue, that I liked Ena and was indebted to her. I went to her and assured her of my loyalty. She had known me a year, and she had seen that I always backed her. Also, she knew that I was in the camp because I had tried to help Jews. Yet all this was of no account. From the day when it looked as though Dr. Klein really would prefer me

to her and that her position was threatened, she made me feel her understandable resentment and tried to send me away on one of the "factory transports", even when Dr. Klein had already been replaced by other S.S. doctors whom she dominated—or at least so I was told by people who certainly ought to have known.

The whole affair petered out. I continued to be fond of her, though I occasionally opposed her measures, and I understood her reaction: "So she's just like the others . . ."—I understood it from the bottom of my heart. There was nothing for which I should not have forgiven a Jewish prisoner in Auschwitz. But it did hurt me.

Later, when I had been transferred from Auschwitz to Dachau, I was present at the arrival of the U.S. troops. An American Jew, who noted my German badge and found that I could speak English, made use of the opportunity to speak to one of us. What he asked me was: "Say, what was the big idea? You wanted to rule the world, didn't you?" I told him that this had not been my idea. "Yeah," he said, "now not one of you wants to admit it." Alas, he was right: not one of them wanted to admit it!

But if he was not ready to believe us, the German political prisoners whom he found there in the concentration camp, whom would he believe? It made me envisage the future with deep concern.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE GERMAN S.S.

THE WORLD has a definite idea of the German S.S., formed through unimpeachable reports, photographs, films and broadcasts. It has come to know the S.S. men as the murderers of Belsen and Buchenwald, Auschwitz and Dachau, as the hangmen, torturers, robbers and racketeers. Over-simplified as this picture must be, it is right and just that it has been drawn in precisely those outlines, to be shown to young people and be kept before their eyes as the incarnation of evil, a perpetual warning and an abomination.

For people who want to understand the psychological process behind the facts, such a picture is not sufficient. It is possible that this is not yet the right time to make a detailed study of those men, which would fill volumes. But even now it should be worth while to show the S.S. men in their daily primitive actions and utterances—as we, the inmates of the German concentration camps, came to know them. This is the raw material from which others will derive their comprehensive vision. And it might not be without an element of danger if meanwhile those S.S. men were to be clothed by the imagination in the demoniacal, evil greatness of their crimes. Criminals of that calibre must have occupied some of the leading posts; Himmler may well have been one of them. But in the places where the crimes were carried through we saw something more puzzling, devastating and ugly: the S.S. men one saw were stupid, incompetent little people who felt important when they could live in villas and drive cars, whose bestial female helpers thought they were great ladies when they could wear fur coats—and who were so completely possessed by their social ambitions that they felt neither frightened nor troubled by the bitter sweat and blood of the prisoners who built their houses, by the shrieks of the Jewish women from whom they took their fur coats at the entrance to the gas chamber. The S.S. in its daily life is one of the ugliest and meanest chapters in the history of the “Thousand-Year-Reich”.

It is important to understand that the S.S. did not consist of people all of the same type. It contained, on the contrary, the most divergent and, indeed, contrasting minds and characters, which complemented each other in a terrifying way and com-

mitted the most inhuman crimes in an uncanny co-operation. Not the leaders, but the lower ranks of the S.S., in their variety of attitudes, were the decisive links in the chain, from our point of view.

In March, 1943, a fire broke out in our camp of Birkenau near Auschwitz, in a store-room which held our private clothes. In all likelihood the fire was started by the prisoners and warders working in the depot because they got wind of an impending inspection in which their large-scale thefts would have been discovered. A spring gale threatened to spread the flames to the surrounding huts. The whole camp was in danger of being burnt down. The women patients of our hospital hut were told to dress, if they were able to walk; the others would be carried out in an emergency. Where to? Nobody knew. Our compound was in an uproar. Half-dead women, wrapped in blankets, got up from their beds and pushed their way towards the door. In the end the fire was kept under control. I asked an S.S. man on guard in the hospital what they would have done with us if the destruction of the camp had left us without any shelter. The man looked at me, candidly, and said after a deep sigh: "We'd have bumped off the lot of you, and then we could have gone home at last." While he said it he looked into the far distance; he must have imagined his homestead, the fields he had ploughed, the roof of a cottage in some small village of the Ukraine whence he had been enticed by promises of a wonderful life of plenty.

This man did not hate us. He did not consider us to be criminals, or even political adversaries. Had he been told that we were going to be fetched in luxury cars and taken to the Riviera, he would have cordially agreed. He wished us neither evil nor well: he wanted to go home. He hated his duty, which meant standing for hours on end in a watch-tower open to the four winds, and staring in front of him. He hated his superiors, who led a snug life in their villas, but sent him to prison—into the "Bunker"—when-ever he got himself a little gold chain by "organising" it, in camp parlance, and whenever he drank a glass too much to drown his misery. He never understood what was happening around him, he had lost all sense of direction, he lived in a world which he sensed to be strange and hostile. They had told him that he was a German National who represented the Herrenvolk in an outpost in the East; he had been promised good pay, was called up in the service of the Reich, and now he was stuck in a concentration camp for women, and felt stupid and unhappy. On paper, he received his pay. In fact he was given pocket money, and the rest of the pay was credited to him. If he wanted to spend more he had to apply in writing and prove the urgency of the purchase.

Only then was he allowed to withdraw some of his money. He was not permitted to leave the camp without a special permit, and the town of Auschwitz was out of bounds for him, because he might spread the epidemic diseases of the camp. His greatest pleasure was an evening in the "German House", for which he had to enter his name on a list a week in advance; once there, he would drink a glass of beer and write a picture postcard; and afterwards there would be a brothel for him. In spite of inoculations, he knew that he himself was by no means safe from epidemics. A great number of our guards fell ill with typhus just as we did, but of course their mortality rate was lower than ours. And then he was constantly told that he had to bear all this because we prisoners were here and must be guarded. What would have been more natural for him than to wish that we no longer existed? He would joyfully have carried out an order to kill us.

The S.S. assembled men like this from odd corners, sons of poor peasants, so-called German Nationals from Poland, Rumania or Croatia, hardly able to speak German, let alone read or write it, so that they preferred to talk among themselves in the language of their region and welcomed prisoners from home as "compatriots". But these men did what they were told to do, without taking it in, fearful of being punished; they were the petty, blunt tools of the powers-that-were, and when they were pushed they turned savage. At times when one did not suffer directly at their hands it was as easy to pity as to hate them. Men like these were the bulk of the rank-and-file of our guards.

They had their counterpart in the ordinary S.S. women, who as a rule were posted to a command. Most of them were girls from the lower middle class, with a sprinkling of "daughters of good families". There were fewer "German Nationals" than Germans and Austrians among them. Their intellectual level, too, was remarkably low: seldom have I seen such a number of genuinely stupid men and women in one place. Once, when our camp doctor discussed a matter of camp hygiene with us, the doctor-prisoners, one of my colleagues suggested that an intelligent wardress would be able to supervise the measure. The doctor asked, astonished: "But have you ever seen an intelligent wardress? I haven't." Another S.S. man told me: "You know, it's like this. If a girl is a street-walker, she's sent to camp as a prisoner. If she only did her stuff in a bar, she gets sent to camp as a wardress." This came close to the truth: a great number of those S.S. women were prostitutes of some sort, who were passed on among the S.S. men, and often kept up a friendship with colleagues among the prisoners. They lived their inane little life, were greedy for anything which could be "organised", knew no limit in taking bribes;

and nearly all of them hoped to accumulate a tidy little sum which would help them towards acquiring a household of their own.

I remember a wardress who felt dreadfully bored one cold, foggy day.

"Girls," she said to us, "imagine being at home, after a good supper, and having a husband with a little car, and he would take you to a nice café with a band—I wonder if we shall ever get something of the kind. . . ."

They all longed for this, and organised their thefts with this aim in mind. They knew that the blood of murdered women was on the trinkets and furs they stole, but did not think twice of it. It practically never occurred to them that they had their share of guilt in those murders. They closed their minds against such ideas, and in general considered everything that happened a matter for the men. They hardly ever had feelings like pity, horror or shame. They had an elemental aversion for prisoners who were prettier and more smartly dressed than they were. One of those good-looking colleagues of mine once complained to me: "The worst guard is better than the best wardress." A few of the wardresses had occasional attacks of a characteristic good humour which would change to rage and arbitrary brutality at any time.

Those were the lowest rungs of the ladder. Then there were some rather more intelligent young men and women—interesting objects for any detailed psychological research. Among the voluntary S.S.—as opposed to those conscripted to the S.S.—were three groups of comparatively intelligent people, according to their attitude to the work they were doing: those who approved of the methods of the concentration camp; those who tried with more or less success to ignore what was going on; and those who were convinced Nazis but unconditionally disapproved of the methods applied.

In the first group—those who actively approved of the mass murder—were people who conformed to the common picture of the S.S. man. They were the sadists, the brutal criminals, organised, legalised and dressed in uniform, who enjoyed torturing human beings, and did it with a passionate conviction. In some of them this passion was primary, and always on the surface. In others, their political conviction acted as an ice-breaker cutting through the thin sheeting of civilisation over the deep sea of their bestial instincts. We could often observe how men of this type would first strike a few blows and then be carried away by the lust of beating, hit more and more savagely, until they were in a sort of paroxysm. Those were the people who committed the atrocities which made the whole world shudder. Were they the worst,

those of whom the German people should feel most deeply ashamed? The deepest shame lies in the fact that they were let loose to rage freely and that their savagery was considered desirable in high places. Otherwise, their cases border on the pathological and call for the psychiatrist's diagnosis rather than for a moral judgment.

Worse, because more dangerous, were the people who in their everyday life, and frequently in their dealings with prisoners, were quite kindly, looked normal, and behaved like any other average civilian—and who were pleased with the mass murder, without any deeper emotion, simply because it was an opportunity for getting a pigskin bag or gold watch which they could never have afforded to buy. Sometimes they would only feel this individual satisfaction, sometimes they would express it in a more general fashion, as by exclaiming: "Look at the things they have, those Jews! And people like us used to have nothing!" Among them were people little concerned with National Socialism as such, its political and social aims or other tenets, and yet belonging to it heart and soul—indeed, with fanaticism—out of their joy at the annihilation of the Jews.

One may find a key to their mental state by thinking of the systematic mania of paranoids whose personality is unaltered outside that system, or by drawing on, say, Levy-Bruehl's work on the mind of primitive peoples. Levy-Bruehl ascribed to some primitive peoples two spheres of thinking: one which belonged to everyday life, where acts were guided by the laws of logic; and another—"pre-logical" thinking in his phraseology—which was connected with totemism. In this second sphere phrases in contradiction to everyday thinking (for instance, phrases identifying the individual with the totem-animal) were impressed on young members of the tribe in affectional conditions, so that they were transfigured to truths beside and above the truths of everyday logic. One might interpret the mental structure of those S.S. men along similar lines.

They were drab little people who would never have been conspicuous if no occasion for extraordinary behaviour had been offered to them. To repeat my previous simile: in normal living conditions they would have had their coating of civilisation, and this coating would not even have been so very thin. Under the impact of the steadily repeated slogans: "The economic crisis—**IS THE WORK OF THE JEWS** . . . the war—**IS THE WORK OF THE JEWS** . . . the death of German children by enemy bombs—**IS THE WORK OF THE JEWS**," they shook off the coating as if with a jerk, with a certain violence. And then part of their being was let loose and raged.

Months after leaving the concentration camp I talked with a

young National Socialist woman who, in the official classification, had not been a "bad" Nazi, had never been in a position of power or had personal profit from it, and in private life was a quiet, modest, friendly person. I hoped to move her by my story of Auschwitz Camp, and finished by saying that no people had ever inflicted so much evil on another group as the German nation on the Jews. In reply she asked me blithely: "Why? Is gassing such a disagreeable death, then?" I was struck silent.

The other group of S.S. "intelligentsia" in the camp were those who refused to see the things around them. Among them were the cowards who were afraid of losing their creed. Some sort of idealism untrammelled by knowledge may have made them believe in the social and cultural aims which had been presented to them, and on these premises they had accepted Hitler and his programme. They had been told that it was necessary to educate "anti-social elements" through "cleanliness, austerity and toil" until they became valuable citizens. Now they tried to interpret the concentration camps as if they were labour camps conducted for that purpose.

Every social order is forced to tackle the problem of criminality, and it is possible to argue that the idea of labour camps is more progressive than that of penitentiaries. It was at this argument that people of the type of which I am speaking used to clutch. Whenever a new compound was built which was, at least to begin with, clean and orderly; whenever prisoners got new under-clothing for once; whenever there was a special treat, such as palatable pickled cabbage at Christmas even for the Jewish compound, they would welcome it as a first step towards the principles they cherished, and would try to believe that those principles would in the end defeat the gas chamber.

In practice there was much of the sort of contradiction in the camps which is often put to the account of Nazi hypocrisy. An X-ray apparatus would at times be used to cure Jewish children of noma, gangrenous ulcer of the cheek, and at times to sterilise their elder sisters. Weak patients would one day be given extra rations, and on the next day be punished by starvation. It is doubtful whether this was common-or-garden hypocrisy: it was so very arbitrary and muddled that it seemed to exclude planning. Yet, it may have been planned with a frightening perspicacity. The overlords had an immense skill in employing the weirdest assortment of people for their ends. Somebody who was a sadist would be found work at beating and hanging; somebody who was kindly would be posted to the medical personnel; a particularly neat person would be set to planning washing-rooms in the works department, and sometimes even to building them; someone who

did not mind dirt and stench stood a good chance of being made "hut leader" in a Jewish compound. A Jew-hater would be allowed to take part in the selections for the gas chamber; somebody who had no strong feelings either way would be able to let others do the dirty work and even from time to time rescue a victim from the transport block. Everyone was kept occupied according to his capacity and inclination. The result was a juxtaposition of opposites without an apparent sense or plan.

For these reasons every S.S. man was able to see in the camp that which he wanted to see, and to dismiss things which would not fit into his vision as "regrettable mistakes" or as "being in the transition stage". Few had the courage to see that this misbegotten tissue of widely divergent tendencies led to horrible results. Those were usually the people who, though failing to change their basic attitude, tried to obtain small improvements here and there, and who attempted to prevent the worst in their personal domain—occasionally! They would be aghast when they saw the practical shape of their ideals, but they were unable or unwilling to renounce them. Still, they did try to behave relatively decently, and they certainly were worried about the outcome of it all. Many of them thought that everything was the fault of the "bosses" in Berlin who did things so differently from "the way the Führer meant them".

Finally, there was the third group, the adversaries of the camp system in the ranks of the S.S. Of them, there was a certain number even among the volunteers whose illusions had been shattered, but most of them were among the men posted compulsorily to the S.S. Some were Socialists or Communists. They would co-operate with the prisoners and sabotage the Camp Command; but since they often had bad experiences through the prisoners' lack of discretion, they were not inclined to take great risks.

All this refers to the S.S. rankers. But there was no sharp dividing line between them and the N.C.O.s who did service as drivers, block leaders and medical orderlies, etc. Among the N.C.O.s of the S.S. the dominant type was that of the Nazi who believed in his cause, its justice, its victory and its Führer. They were mostly people from the lower middle class—barbers, clerks, commercial agents—but quite a number belonged to the working class.

I had many talks with those young men, sons of good Socialist workers, who served in the S.S. as convinced Nazis, and sometimes I tried to penetrate into their mental world of absolute amorality. It is strictly true to say that the Ten Commandments, which are the foundation of every form of our ethics, meant nothing to them,

least of all the "Thou shalt not kill", and that it did not cost them the slightest inner effort to break those commandments. Mostly, they were products of an education which had failed to solve the difficult problem of how to inculcate non-religious moral principles. Their parents had been educated in the spirit of a definite "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not" based on a Christian faith. Even though their fathers may have repudiated the dogma of their Church when they were adults, and, when they joined the workers' movement, become hostile to the Church because of the Church's political attitude, they instinctively retained the solid moral creed of their childhood. Nothing would be a grosser mistake than to accuse the Central European "Marxist" workers—that is, Socialists and Communists—in the period after 1914 of lack of moral principles or of libertinism. On the contrary, the moral fibre of those workers was strengthened when they began to feel responsible to the working class and considered themselves the servants of a cause. There is, however, another side to it: many of the workers of those generations lacked the capacity of transmitting their wealth of valid ethical principles to their children in a form which would have been impressive and emotionally attractive.

To my mind, this represents the cardinal problem of any ethical education of youth. It is as difficult for intellectually honest parents to instil into their children moral tenets strong enough to become guiding principles—without adhering to the outward forms of organised religion, which are so marvellously adapted to child mentality—as it is to educate their children during their early years in the forms of a faith which they, the parents, have shed. This dilemma existed not only for socialist working-class parents, but also for a great many intellectuals in Germany and Austria, countries where those social strata had repudiated the Churches more radically and in greater numbers than in other European countries—possibly because their intellectual radicalism was greater, their capacity for compromise smaller. It is a fact that an enormous number of active young National Socialists came from one of those two social groups. If I state this, it is not to criticise their parents for their mental attitude, but to point out the urgent need to find new paths in the children's education and to achieve more profoundly effective methods.

It was the frightening lack of the most primitive moral code which enabled those young people to see and take part in all the atrocities, and yet not to doubt the value of their political ideals.

A second important factor was of great influence among the young working-class Nazis: the National Socialist movement, although it was initiated and subsidised by the ruling classes, was

staffed in such a way as to appear a genuine workers' movement in the eyes of its supporters. Once the commander of the Munich factory camp said to me, whom he obviously regarded as being a staunch representative of plutocracy: "Why do you people hate National Socialism? Because now the worker has a say in things." The man, in civilian life a traveller in underwear, only said what he firmly believed to be true. In other words, the Nazis had succeeded where the Socialists and Communists had failed after many years' effort: they had succeeded in making the lower middle-class people first realise and then freely accept their economic link with the working classes, and in persuading them that "they, the workers", had something to say—in a State whose machinery was carrying out their liquidation, but in which many individuals from their ranks attained real power through the Nazi Party and its affiliated organisations. This process was incarnate in Hitler.

When the "Marxist" workers of Germany and Austria began to claim their right to govern the State they prepared themselves for their task by trying to break down the educational monopoly of the old rulers. They studied, they read, they trained their minds in the school of a political doctrine which was shaped, significantly enough, by an intellectual who had gone through the mill of the philosophical systems of the bourgeoisie. Nowhere in Central Europe is there a greater treasure of "bourgeois culture", a more reverently cherished legacy from centuries of bourgeois civilisation, than in the minds of outstanding men and women of working-class origin, who rise above the level of their social group through their own strength. But for the others who were either too weak or not gifted enough to travel this difficult road to freedom from ignorance and boorishness, Hitler provided a comfortable means of shedding the sense of social impotence, and belonging to the culturally leading layer of society. They were the people who became the vast reservoir from which the Nazi Party drew its members.

In their behaviour to us prisoners, people of this brand were either particularly cruel or particularly decent, but mostly both in rotation. They would be particularly cruel to us if they believed us to be criminals deserving extinction—a belief which they usually held in the case of Jews; to those whom they accepted as human beings they were often quite human themselves. But not every man or woman was human in their eyes, and a Jew was human to them in exceptional cases only. Thus they would seem brutal monsters to one prisoner, fairly decent persons to another, and both things would be true of them. There were many of their type among the female S.S., even in the highest ranks.

Such a woman was Johanna Bormann, who was sentenced to

death at Lueneburg. She was a fanatical Nazi who hated all Poles and Russians from the bottom of her heart. She must have been even worse in her dealings with Jews, though I personally never observed her at it. Once I was sent for a few weeks to a working party on the land in the small village of Babice near Auschwitz, to take over the sick-bay there. The camp doctor, Dr. Rohde, told me in advance: "You won't have a bad time there, only the supervisor is an impossible female. Don't take orders from her—you're working directly under me." The ugly woman with the hard, sullen face welcomed me with the words: "Do you speak German?" When I told her that I was German, she said, pleased: "Then I hope you'll be hard with them". She hoped in all seriousness to find a helper in me; she generally used German prisoners in all leading posts, although the working party was exclusively composed of Polish and Russian prisoners. It was her ambition to turn it into a "model compound". At that time, when she was still convinced of a German victory, she followed the method of what she called "correct hardness". I did not see her during the collapse, but I can well imagine that she raged with a savage fury against the prisoners as soon as she sensed the coming doom. She hated me, when she realised that I was of no use to her, but she never dared to hurt me. As I was very weak after my attack of typhus, she permitted me to take a few hours' rest every afternoon; she even produced a clean, decent dress for me, on her principle that German prisoners were to be favoured. When one of us faced her with calm self-confidence, she became subdued. It was essential to her mentality that she should be asked about every detail, but even more essential that she should stick to whatever decision she had once made.

As I was sheltered by the authority of Dr. Rohde, one of the most decent S.S. doctors who were ever in the camp, she had to leave me alone, but the other prisoners were at her mercy. Once an extra cauldron of food was sent to Babice by mistake: rather than distribute it—which would have been against her principles—she let it go bad. She was constantly afraid of being tricked. In her eyes, women lying ill with a temperature of 103° F. were shamming, and she used to chase them out of the beds; on the following day we would find that their illness was typhus. When she saw a girl laughing, she would growl: "You'll soon forget about laughing . . .", and when one of the girls cried, she would be angry. She invented petty, senseless rules and punishments, raged against plucked eyebrows and well-fitting prison dresses, and made herself ridiculous by it. She saw herself as someone who was "severe, but just"; and she was a miserable, unhappy creature who was loved by nobody, who loved nobody but her dog. In

our camp she did not use that dog against prisoners, but fed it until it became fat, heavy and lazy. But this may have changed at a later stage. It is not astonishing that this woman refused to appeal against the death sentence. To her the defeat of her Germany was the end.

The small outlying camp of Babice was an interesting sample because of the Bormann woman and her counterpart, the Medical N.C.O. Flagge. Johanna Bormann was "compound leader" and the terror of 180 prisoners, who otherwise, as far as living, eating and washing conditions were concerned, were infinitely better off than their colleagues in the big camp. Flagge was the good spirit of the camp. In the fifties, a railway official in private life (and in my opinion a former Social Democrat), he was called "Dad" by the girls, whom he liked to spoil and call his children. When it rained he ordered that the schoolrooms in which we were housed should be heated, so that we should be able to dry our clothes. If a girl suffered badly during her menstruation, he gave her a permit to stop working for the day. Whenever he received his ration of cake, or a gift of eggs from a peasant, he would give them to me, our Polish nurse, and the Jewish doctor of the neighbouring men's compound. Once he and his superior came into our small surgery at four in the afternoon, and found both myself and the nurse fast asleep. He told his chief: "Let them sleep," and they left. That evening he timidly said to me: "You know, one of you two really ought to be up at that time of the day—it might make things very awkward for me otherwise." His attitude created an improbable, isolated idyll.

I once asked Flagge how a man of his sort could bear to be in the S.S. He retorted: "Would you prefer a brute in my place?" I found it difficult to answer. On the other hand, he exclaimed repeatedly that he would like to live with his family on an island in the Pacific. Oddly enough, he did not get into trouble; he acted unobtrusively and never became conspicuous. He was never promoted either. His case exemplifies how much depended on the individual and his actions, and how untrue was the excuse of the others who claimed that they could not help having to do their acts of vileness. They had no courage, Flagge had courage—that is all.

In Babice, Flagge conducted a stubborn campaign against Johanna Bormann. Again and again he denounced her in writing to the District Medical Officer. Finally he forbade her to enter the sick-bay, and we profited from it. But his efforts to get rid of her failed because the Camp Command backed her. Chance intervened. One night, when the barbed wire screening the windows of the school buildings was loose, a pretty Polish girl got

away. The guard was changed at midnight, and it was impossible to pin the responsibility on one of the sentries for certain, since nobody knew the exact hour of her escape. In the circumstances the Bormann woman was made responsible, although it was palpably not her fault: she had locked us up in the evening according to rules, had gone to her room, had not known about the incident until the morning, and was the only person in the whole place whom nobody could suspect of having connived in the flight. But she was the responsible supervisor of the compound. So there she sat and cried bitterly at the loss of one of her flock. On the following day she was punished by being relieved of her post. A result which our Medical N.C.O.'s sense of justice had struggled in vain to obtain was brought about through the arbitrary S.S. principle by which people were made responsible for things outside their sphere of action. The S.S. applied this principle not only against prisoners, but also against their best—that is to say their worst—members.

There existed two such forms of punishment in all the concentration camps, which killed any genuine sense of responsibility and which the Nazis were the first to employ. One was to make a whole group responsible for an offence committed by one of its members, particularly when the offender was not known. The other was to make "leaders" responsible for whatever those under them had done. The group punishment was calculated to produce denunciations, as indeed it often succeeded in doing. The punishment of the leaders was intended to prevent any future possible co-operation or connivance of the higher ranks in matters which would threaten them with degradation.

Both methods created impossible situations for us prisoners, in cases where we had no idea who had done something, and so were unable to denounce anybody, even if we had wanted to, and in which there was no one who could have come forward with a confession.

The stupid futility of the method was brought home to me at the beginning of my work in the camp hospital of Birkenau.

I was busy examining my patients when the order came: "Staff to form up in front of the camp gate." In my innocence I went out in my white overall, without bothering to take a jacket. What had happened was that the Head Wardress had found some old bread rations in the unlit stove of our sick ward. This was during one of the epidemics, when much bread was left over, because many patients for whom we had received bread rations in the morning died in the course of the day or ran a high temperature which made it impossible for them to eat bread. Nobody knew who had thrown those particular pieces of bread into the

stove. The Head Wardress was furious. She gave us a lecture about the sacredness of bread in the fifth year of the war, and told us that the entire staff would have to stay lined up out there until the offender had given herself up. In the meantime our patients were alone, with no one at hand to give them their food or a bedpan.

At first I found the open air a relief. But it was early March. A gale started up and snow fell. It grew very cold. No culprit came forward to face the angry wardress. It was uncertain whether one of the staff or one of the patients had done the deed; but even if the person concerned was in our ranks, she certainly found it easier to stand there among us, undiscovered, than to be slapped by the Head Wardress. The whole morning we were kept standing in the snow, while the sick lay neglected and the Head Wardress ran up and down our ranks in fury. The senseless show seemed interminable. Our salvation came from an unexpected quarter. Our Medical N.C.O.—not one of the worst of his kind, but a stupid man—came riding past on his bicycle and asked the Head Wardress what it was all about. "Because they've thrown bread into the stove," she cried indignantly, whereupon he in turn asked: "Well, where should they throw it?" He may have had a dim notion that it was the right thing to throw away bread which might have been lying under the soaked palliasses of women ill with enteric typhoid, as the patients had to keep everything stored in their beds. The Head Wardress stared at him aghast, and we grinned. In the end she dismissed us and the affair petered out. When we came back to our ward we found that three of our patients had died in the meantime.

Another time somebody poured out her washing-water in front of the hospital hut. The camp doctor decided that our whole staff should be punished by a week's hard work on the road. I tried to make him see that the worst sufferers would be the patients, if they were to be handed over to emergency staff without training. He stuck to his order, but added: "The whole staff, except the doctor, because I'm sure she's too lazy to empty the wash-basin herself." I suspect he felt he would appear somewhat ridiculous if he really sent his professional colleague—a woman his own age—to make roads. Also, it would have been difficult for him to carry on without me. But it would have been unthinkable to admit such qualms even to himself, so he had to find a way out which would save his face. In the end I was punished worst, because I had to carry on work in the hut for a whole week with untrained, callous auxiliary nurses.

I quote this petty incident, because it is characteristic: those mass murderers were also stupid little people who were always afraid for their imagined dignity.

Those people were in a quandary. It was difficult for them to keep up discipline, even more difficult among us women than among the male prisoners. Unless our gaolers wanted to inflict heavy punishment on us—which would endanger our health and lives—they resorted to this more readily with the men than with the women, in spite of everything; they had no really effective disciplinary means. For a factor decisive in normal life was completely absent in camp: any moral recognition of the authorities. They may not have known this, but they felt the result.

It will sound peculiar, but I felt somehow freer in camp, except for the live wire which prevented me from going home, than I had felt in the freedom outside, because I never felt bound by a single one of the rules laid down by the S.S. I observed them only as far as I considered them of benefit to them prisoners, and felt free to break them whenever I was unobserved. At liberty outside a camp or prison, you observe the laws, as a rule, even when you are not afraid of being caught out in an act of disobedience.

In such a situation, penalties the aim of which was to appeal to our sense of honour were simply ludicrous in our eyes. Once I worked in an outlying post of Dachau Camp, in a factory camp at East Munich. There women prisoners were often punished by being sent to the "bunker" of the men's camp. Theoretically they were supposed to be kept in the cell three days and three nights, on their feet, with nothing but bread and water. In practice the men prisoners or the girls themselves used to bribe the S.S. After the nightly check-up they would get palliasses and decent food; on the second day they would be declared ill, with a temperature of 103° F., which made it necessary to send them to hospital. There a kindly doctor, himself a prisoner, would remove their appendices; after two weeks in bed they would come back to our camp very much recuperated. It was considered that a girl was extremely lucky if she was sent to the "bunker", in which other prisoners had been tortured to death.

Once a spell in the "bunker" threatened me, too, and I said that I did not really mind it. The Medical N.C.O. said naïvely:—"But you would surely find it a great humiliation if you were sent to the 'bunker'?" I gaped: did the man live in the moon? We camp prisoners had only one yardstick: whatever helped our survival was good, whatever threatened our survival was bad and to be avoided. It would never have occurred to us that the S.S. men could humiliate or shame us by their methods of punishment. I tried to make this clear to the Medical N.C.O., a man who behaved decently to women prisoners and accepted frank talk in private. I put it more or less in these words: "It is like this—here I feel as if I were walking alone through the 'dangerous' ward of a

mental hospital and was suddenly attacked by raving madmen. It would be extremely unpleasant, I should be afraid, I should try to calm them down, but I should feel neither hurt nor offended by their attitude." The man was bewildered to hear that this point of view, which was novel to him, could be put forward.

This does not mean that all the prisoners would have agreed with me. An immense number of them had lost much of their self-respect under the constant coercion and the miserable conditions of living, and used to complain bitterly about the painful moral humiliation they suffered. Also, my personal position in the camp—particularly in Auschwitz, where I was the only non-Jewish, German doctor among the prisoners—was decidedly better than that of others. I could afford to do things for which others would have been hanged. Yet, even taking all this into account, I found that many prisoners maintained the strong self-assurance of people who were defenceless in everything but their personality. I found this even more frequently among women than among men.

My comrades often warned me not to go too far, and they were right. Sooner or later there was a limit to the toleration of every S.S. man; the limit receded if one was able to disconcert them, but it was vital not to overstep it. Yet the closer you came to the danger line, the more arrogant and self-assured your behaviour in the face of those men, the more they tended to retreat, the less they found the courage to do harm. It was of the utmost importance not to let them intimidate you, not to wait for their unjust reproaches, but to launch an accusation against them yourself, and flatly to refuse obedience to any order which would have made you do things you thought unbearable. Those of us who had discovered this method found that we fared better than if we had been obsequious and terrified. Intoxicated by their power as they were, the S.S. men were as uncertain of themselves as any adolescent. But only those of the prisoners with whom the S.S. were either inclined or compelled to enter into conversation had an opportunity to baffle them. Many others would have had the same firmness and self-confidence, but they never got so far as to open their mouths. They were lost in the nameless multitude, silenced and muted, and perished. It is of the privileged minority that I am speaking now and whose encounters with the S.S. I am describing.

The Regional Medical Officer, Dr. Wirtz, once posted a French colleague of mine to the women's ward in the men's hospital at Auschwitz, the ward in which the most infamous medical experiments were carried out, particularly on Jewesses from Greece. I had been in the ward as a patient for three weeks, after my typhus

attack, but I retain only a very dim memory of a fear-ridden atmosphere and of the gnome-like Professor Glauberg, who was then making sterilisation experiments with X-rays—he was also the creator of the maternity centre of Silesia, the so-called Mothers' City! The French doctor was ordered to operate on women who were suspected of cancer in the womb diagnosed by the "Kolposcope"—an instrument much in fashion at that time, because it was hoped that it would allow an early diagnosis of that kind of cancer. The operation my colleague was supposed to carry through consisted of a surgical reduction of the womb; she did it whenever she thought the operations medically justifiable. When they sent her patients in whose cases she found no reason for a surgical intervention, she simply said that she would not operate any more. At first Dr. Wirtz tried to persuade her. He asked her if it was really her opinion that Jews deserved the same sort of consideration as other humans. She said yes, it was her opinion. Dr. Wirtz began to threaten and to rage. She told him calmly: "You can shoot me, you can put me in a 'punishment column', but you can't force me to operate." And nothing happened to her. In the concentration camps refusal of work one was ordered to do was a capital offence which involved execution by a firing squad. But the S.S. doctor was so disconcerted at her unexpected, inconceivable opposition that he did not know what to do with such a woman. In his frustration he sent her back to the women's camp, where she resumed work in our hospital.

I know that it was not easy to follow this line, and that it required a certain degree of personal and social poise, which the prisoner had to bring into the camp from his or her life outside. This is, however, the very reason why I think that such an attitude could be expected more easily of intellectuals, inside and outside the camp; it would not only have been more honourable, it would have been wiser. Unfortunately, all too many of the intellectuals failed in this respect. And though those who were faithful to themselves kept their superiority, everyone was lost who once lowered himself to the level of the S.S. people. Of course there was a continuous risk in the firm attitude as well, because the S.S. turned savage if they became conscious of their inferiority.

The S.S. hated nothing so much as the attitude of a prisoner who contended: "It's all the same to me". They would start to explain that this was quite the wrong way of thinking, we had our duty to our family, and so forth. After all, their system of dominating the German prisoners was based on the pretence that we could earn our release by good conduct; this tied them to the Camp Command. In reality the good conduct of a prisoner had hardly any influence on the release. We had been sent to the camp

for an indefinite period—until our “re-education and improvement” were completed—and either the date of the release was fixed in advance in higher quarters, or there was never to be such a date at all. Conspicuous behaviour in camp might postpone the date of a planned release, that was all. In Auschwitz, at least, it was the merest farce to speak of any check on the attitude, political or otherwise, of the prisoners.

The Ministry of the Interior in Berlin would inquire of the Camp Command about the conduct of prisoner No. So-and-So, and ask if the Commandant had any objections to her release. The matter would be passed on to the Head Wardress. She would not have the least opinion about it, except in the case of a prominent prisoner or one whom she happened to know personally. Therefore she would send for the prisoner in question and interrogate her.

This Head Wardress was an Austrian from Braunau-on-Inn, Hitler's birthplace. Before being promoted to Head Wardress in Birkenau-Auschwitz she had been wardress in the “bunker”, the gaol, of Ravensbrück, where she was notorious for her bestial treatment of the prisoners. It was reported that she almost beat them to death whenever she meted out the twenty-five lashes with the whip. Some of the prisoners who had known her in Ravensbrück Camp found it difficult to recognise her in Auschwitz. It was generally assumed that her fiancé had forbidden her to take an active part in beatings. Unfortunately, he was transferred later on, as a punishment because he had “organised” something, and she resumed her practice.

In her own fashion she was a handsome woman—tall, broad, strong, with a clear, high-coloured skin, beautiful golden hair and blue eyes. It was easy to imagine her as the mistress of a country inn plus butcher's shop and the mother of seven children, with the reins of the household firmly in her hands. As it was, she was the absolute ruler over 20,000 women prisoners. In a crazy, but obviously sincere, way she was passionately devoted to her “Führer”, in whose spirit she intended to train the grown-up, mature women subjected to her. She had a genuine love for two things: music and children. For the Jewish conductor of our camp orchestra—the great violinist Alma Rosée—she had a real reverence and something like friendship: she told her repeatedly that she would be the very last person ever to enter a gas chamber! When Alma Rosée fell ill, the Head Wardress ordered us to put her in a room by herself—that is, the Hut Senior was forced to give up her own room. The same Head Wardress helped the Camp Doctor to select the victims for the gas chamber.

Once I saw four charming little Jewish children waiting outside

her office door, while their despairing mothers stood near them, fearing the worst. "O", as she was called (O stands for *Oberaufseherin*—Head Wardress), fetched the children into her room; five minutes later they reappeared, each clutching a packet of cake and chocolate. The same Head Wardress shared the guilt in the death of countless thousands of children—their death in the flames. She was capable of a normal, motherly woman's reactions, and of turning herself into a wild beast.

She liked to make presents—of things which were not hers. I knew it from my own experience. Much as I hated to ask favours from those people, knowing that I would get them, but knowing also who were the givers, I sometimes forced myself, for the sake of my child, to ask permission to write my son little special letters illustrated with drawings. The Head Wardress would not only give me the permission every time, but she would show her sympathy by slipping something into my hand, such as a dried fruit or a tin of sardines. I would take it with a shrug and go away. Once she gave me a voucher for the parcels' depot, and told me to get "a nice parcel". In the depot were the so-called death parcels, which had been sent by the relatives of prisoners who had died, but of whose deaths they had not yet been notified. This may well have been one of the reasons why such notices were considerably delayed. The S.S. used to distribute the parcels as a favour after having taken their full share. When I fetched my parcel I happened to glance at the address, and started: it was directed to one of my patients who had died of tuberculosis, and in whose case I reproached myself with not having discovered her disease in time. Probably an earlier diagnosis would not have saved her; but now it shook me to think that I was going to enjoy a cake baked for her, possibly by her mother. We had grown so blunted in camp that we were capable of things which would have seemed unthinkable to us in normal life.

It was never quite clear to me what idea was in the minds of the S.S. when they made us that sort of present. Once, in the autumn of 1944, when the collapse of the Reich was expected any day, all German prisoners were ordered to the camp gate. There were only about ninety of us left, and we had all sorts of ideas of what they were going to do with us. Were they going to transfer us—release us—shoot us? In the end the Head Wardress appeared and asked: "Are all the Germans here now?" A fifty-year-old woman was missing; she was fetched from the far end of the camp to complete our number. Then the Head Wardress took a cardboard box out of the hands of a wardress, and said: "Well, here is some chocolate for you, and if you behave, you'll get some again." Each of us was given a small piece of chocolate taken

from Swiss Red Cross parcels. First we were dumbfounded, then we had to take a hold on ourselves so as not to burst out laughing. Nearly all of us were political prisoners; while the "black" and the "green" prisoners—the non-political groups—had been transferred pending the liquidation of the camp, we had been left in Auschwitz to do the responsible jobs among the prisoners. Among us were a young Communist girl who had been nine years in prison; a journalist who had been a nurse during the Spanish Civil War; grown-up women, mothers, who had suffered and witnessed all the misery and crime—we all had in us a reasoned, deeply rooted hatred of our gaolers. Now those gaolers were frightened, and attempted to placate and suborn us in the twelfth hour—with a piece of chocolate. This was how those brains imagined the world. . . .

Friendly though the Head Wardress might occasionally be towards children and mothers, her sexual jealousy of young girls was conspicuous. She never tired of inventing new, unbecoming ways of tying the scarves the girls wore on their heads, she decreed nun-like hair-styles, she hated every woman prisoner who was relatively well dressed, and in particular she hated our very attractive Jewish Chief Doctor. The prisoners ridiculed her edicts and nobody observed them as a rule, and, if they had to be observed for once, the pretty Polish girls would still know how to look more attractive than all the wardresses.

Every contact of the girls with the men in the neighbouring camps was severely punished. Nevertheless, all the moderately good-looking girls had their men friends, and a number of children were not only born, but also conceived, in camp. Once I had a patient, an extremely pretty and flighty girl, who was in the sixth month of pregnancy. I had to report the fact to the Head Wardress, who sent for the girl. Later she told me of her conversation with "O"—according to her, the wardress had talked good sense, had tried to explain the folly of making her life in camp more difficult by having a fatherless child, and then suddenly suggested: "Listen, give me the child. I'm so unhappy that I haven't got children—it would be like my own." The deeper psychological connections will be obvious, not only to psychoanalysts.

This was the woman who interrogated prisoners in order that she might report on their conduct to the Camp Command. Once I passed through the farce myself. Several of us were ordered to wait outside the Head Wardress' office for our interview. We waited from seven in the morning till eleven. We were due to go in at ten, but her fiancé came to visit her, and we had to wait an hour more. The delay was fortunate for us, because it left her in

a good temper, at the moment in which she had to decide on our future. When my turn came, she asked me why I was in camp. On my answering that I had helped Jews to escape abroad, she replied: "But how can one do a thing like that!"—in the tone of a school-teacher who is annoyed because her pupils have slid down the bannister. Then she went on: "Well, would you do it another time?"

What was I to answer? Should I tell her that at first I had felt a bit unhappy at the burden I had taken upon myself, but that, after knowing Auschwitz, I approved ten times, a hundred times, more strongly of the fact that I had at least attempted to save a few people from this fate? I wanted to shout all my horror, all my anger into her face—but it would have been utterly futile. To speak one's mind to those people was an empty demonstration; I felt no urge to risk anything merely to show off to a fundamentally stupid woman. What I said was: "There aren't any Jews left in Vienna." This seemed to strike her as highly satisfactory, and she made a favourable report on my conduct; if it had depended on her, I should have been released. But her favourable opinion did not cut much ice in Berlin, and I remained where I was.

Another prisoner was less lucky with the Head Wardress. She was a little Catholic lay-sister, a spinster in her forties, who would not have harmed a fly and had not the faintest idea of politics. She had grumbled about the unfaithful, had been sent to camp, almost died of typhus, and was proposed for release after a year's detention. The good woman did not understand her situation at all. When "O" asked her if she meant to join her order again after her release, she did not try to evade an answer by saying, for instance, that she did not know if the nursing order still existed, or something of the sort, but answered eagerly: "Oh yes; it's just the same as the 'brown' nurses, only it's Catholic." The Head Wardress was angry: "So, so; and don't you know that it is the fault of the Pope that the English are in Rome now?" In our camp there was neither a wireless nor a paper; though papers were smuggled into the camp by the men; in any case, no news ever reached the little Catholic nurse. "I didn't know that the English are in Rome," she stammered, scared. "Well, I hope you realise that with your ideas you'll have to reckon with many years in camp," said "O", and dismissed the astonished woman, who could not understand what was happening to her. She was still in camp a year later.

More grotesque was the case of another prisoner. She was a young Socialist worker, an Austrian, with honest revolutionary convictions, but immature, and not to be taken seriously as a political factor. She had been three years in concentration camps,

and was posted to the "Unionwerke" in May, 1944. She did not want to do the work, and said publicly in the factory, without considering the consequences: "No, I won't make ammunition for Germany." It caused an uproar; she was gaoled in the "bunker", an investigation was decreed, a special report to Berlin prepared: things looked very ugly. Suddenly it became known that, six weeks before, the official inquiry about the girl's release had been dealt with by the Head Wardress—who, knowing the girl personally, had been biased in favour of an Austrian, never interrogated her, and made a recommendation for release: "She had been successfully educated in the concentration camp, and it was to be assumed that she would now be a valuable member of the national community. . . ." What now? Should they report the offending statement to Berlin, as all other serious offences were reported, and so reveal their blunder? Camp Leader Hässler, of Belsen fame, who disliked both the Head Wardress and the political prisoners (he preferred the "black" prisoners, the little tarts, whom he pitied), was all for the report to Berlin. But it so happened that he was in hot water over a timber theft, and shortly after was sent away, allegedly to the S.S. Detention Camp at Dachau—which did not prevent his being made Leader of another of the Auschwitz Camps later on. This left the Head Wardress free to gloss over the affair. In the end they decided on a Solomonic procedure. The girl, who in the meantime had learned that she would be released, had to report to the Political Section. She was asked if she was willing to retract what she had said, and answered "Yes". Upon this she was sent home. These were the principles by which the S.S. decided on our detention in camp, and so on the life or death of untold thousands of women.

Among the higher S.S. ranks, of which I mainly knew the camp doctors, there were some individuals of rather greater intelligence. Their level was still below the average of the Army officers, but a certain number could be classed as intellectuals of a sort. On the whole, the S.S. ranks of the higher grades were increasingly divided into fanatical brutes—such as Grabner, Aumaier, Kramer, and so on—and out-and-out cynics. Even among the so-called intellectuals the predominant characteristics were a boundless conceit, the urge to interfere in everything and to impose their will in an absolute form, and the habit of treating all other people as minors, above all the prisoners. Occasionally all this led to ludicrous events which brought a light relief into the terror of our day-by-day life. Such a burlesque was the so-called struggle for Dagmar. It throws light on another complex of motives which dominated those people, the more so as its protagonist

was a relatively reasonable S.S. officer, the camp doctor, Dr. Koenig.

The child whom the Head Wardress wanted for herself before it was born turned out to be a very charming baby girl, and its romantically inclined mother christened it Dagmar. As the birth took place in my hospital hut, I followed the whole story from its beginnings. Two days after the delivery Dr. Koenig came up to the mother, still in bed, and said: "The child is not alive." We were aghast. It had been a healthy little being, and although its German nationality saved it from the immediate danger of being killed, everything was possible in this camp. It turned out to be the doctor's "joke": Dr. Koenig explained that legally the child was not yet alive, as he had not signed the birth certificate. And he was not willing to sign it either, so he declared, because Dagmar was not a German name. The child had to be named differently. He departed after this. The young mother cried bitterly; for nine months she had been looking forward to a Dagmar. Of course, her sorrow seemed a little childish in these surroundings. I suggested as a compromise, christening the child Gertrud-Dagmar, and to call it Dagmar afterwards, but the mother would not hear of it; I tackled the camp doctor and begged him to sign the certificate—after all, it was a Swedish name, and the Swedes were a friendly nation. He refused, because "the Swedes were not a friendly nation; they disliked us Germans". I still tried to treat the whole affair as a joke, and said that possibly the Swedes had a special liking for us, the prisoners. Dr. Koenig let it pass without getting annoyed, but asked why the silly girl, the mother, insisted on the name Dagmar. When I explained that she had read it in a novel, he promised to give her another novel to read. In this way a few days passed. The young mother was out of bed, and went to Dr. Koenig herself, to explain to him that Dagmar was a good Gothic name, and would he please sign? When this plea failed she got hold of one of the official National Socialist calendars of names, and proved to him that among the D's Dorothea and Dagmar were listed as admissible. The doctor riposted by producing a more recent edition, in which only Dorothea was listed; apparently the editor had discovered the Swedish antagonism. . . .

At this stage the Political Section of the camp squashed the wrangle. It declared that it had already reported the birth of a Dagmar L . . . , at Birkenau, Kasernenstrasse, to both registrar and police, following the data given by the mother, and since it was not willing to make any alteration, the doctor would have to sign. He did so, wild with fury, and wrote a denunciation to the Ministry of the Interior in Berlin, in which he accused the

Political Section of the camp of having accepted an inadmissible name in excess of its authority.

All this happened in the days in which the Allied troops were making their lightning advance through northern France; Finland, Bulgaria and Rumania had capitulated; and the fate of the German Reich was sealed. In those days the S.S. doctor and *Untersturmführer* had no greater worries than to quarrel with a young girl about her daughter's Christian name. It was incomprehensible, until by pure chance I found the key to the doctor's infantile behaviour. I saw his private letters when he posted them in the hospital office to save the stamps; among them was a letter to his wife: to Frau Dr. *Dagmar* Koenig. It had annoyed him that the "child of a criminal" should have the same name as his wife, that was all, international politics, racially admissible names and Goths notwithstanding. But the dark side to the comedy was that he ordered me to dismiss mother and child at once from the hospital, although she was suffering from tuberculosis. Later I had a patient who had milk in excess, and wanted to let her suckle little Dagmar: Dr. Koenig hated the "victorious" mother so much that he forbade this, and found another baby—of one of the Russian women—to be given the breast.

This petty little story, with all its personal trimmings, is a characteristic sample. But apart from this Dr. Koenig was in reality one of those National Socialists who should be of particular interest to anti-Fascists, because in their case an education in human and European thinking is not quite as hopelessly doomed to failure as in others. He was the type of German whom foreign friends from pre-Hitler days would remember with sympathy and with the constant query: "How could this man degenerate in such a way? What has possessed him? He can't be the same man." He was intelligent, saw through pretence, really showed medical knowledge—a rare thing among camp doctors—and had the will to learn new things in his profession. Very quickly he discovered the best among the Jewish doctors, and accepted their instruction without arrogance or false shame. His judgment of people was acute, he was objective, not petty, and in details not inhuman; he worked from morning till night without any regard for his personal comfort to bring some order into our hospital. In another age he might have been one of the physicians who helped to give German academic medicine a good name. And this man was a genuine, convinced, fanatical National Socialist. How was it possible?

Perhaps it can be said of him that he forced himself to be a good Nazi. He had moments when he doubted his creed, and even expressed his doubt. Once he said with a sigh to our Jewish

Chief Doctor, for whom he, like most of his colleagues, felt a deep respect: "Maybe the English way of living isn't so bad, after all. . . ." The slight doubt: "Perhaps everything we do is quite wrong", was ever present, threateningly present, in his mind; he fought against it, he did not want to let it grow, and for this very reason he became more rigid and fanatical than many another.

Oh yes, he esteemed British democratic liberalism; but in his opinion it could flourish only on the basis of British wealth, in the atmosphere of a far-flung Empire, and Germany would be able to afford anything like it only when she possessed a similar empire. He was one of those Germans who think that their countrymen played the fool for centuries, by battling with ethical and philosophical problems while other nations built their empires. Now, as he told himself with a deliberate effort, Germany was struggling to make up for all that had been neglected; at that moment nothing else counted and nothing else was permitted to count. People of his kind regarded every moral issue from this point of view. From this point of view a man like Dr. Koenig volunteered for the S.S. and for service in a concentration camp, from this point of view he acted his official part in the selections for the gas chambers.

In the mental tangle of those people there was another important strand: their attitude to moral values was derived from an immature refusal to understand the unavoidable discrepancy between the ethical imperative and human nature. In my opinion, this is connected with the essentially Protestant thinking of certain types of Germans. Contrary to it, Catholic thinking, in the widest sense of the word, recognises moral laws in private and public life, but at the same time accepts the fact that human beings are not capable of an absolute fulfilment of those laws. This mature understanding, which reckons with human weakness and therefore forgives the failure of the individual, seems to the Protestant (in my interpretation of the term) nothing but "laxity". This attitude may lead him into so-called hypocrisy which consists in hiding from himself and others every lapse from righteousness, but which despite its lack of intellectual honesty has a positive element: the feeling of shame, which causes the repudiation of human failings, is in itself a recognition and confirmation of the ethical code. It seems to me the key to the moral behaviour of the conservative German society.

Equally dominated by the Protestant categorical imperative, part of the younger generation rebelled against that social and moral hypocrisy. From the ranks of these rebels came men like Pastor Niemöller or Albert Schweitzer, who refused to dilute the absolute moral demands with practical considerations and

attempted to follow the "hard way". The "Free German Youth Movement" after the first world war also started from this ethical rebellion. The majority—those who could not bear the strain of living up to inhumanly lofty ideals, suffered under their own and their nation's failure in practical life, and yet would not contemplate renouncing the aim of making ideals and conduct coincide—were driven into a third solution: that of creating a new set of moral values which would fit in with their natural selfish impulses instead of exacting their suppression. Those were the people who brought into the National Socialist movement a high-sounding pseudo-morality whose slogans they passionately and absolutely believed—and not only because they benefited from them. The might and glory of the German Empire was their ultimate moral standard. At the end of this road was the war, the concentration camp and the gas chamber—a terrifying and terrible incarnation of those adolescent notions of "all or nothing".

It may be that the catastrophe of Fascism will teach the best among those people an adult interpretation of man's attitude to his own behaviour in the real world.

The worst among the rebels against the "old morality" went a step further and converted idealistic selfishness into open cynicism, in the fashion of the saying: "Nothing for us, everything for Germany—and Germany, that's ourselves."

The most nauseating type of S.S. were to me personally the cynics who no longer genuinely believed in their cause, but went on collecting blood guilt for its own sake. Those cynics were not always brutal to the prisoners, their behaviour changed with their mood. They took nothing seriously—neither themselves nor their cause, neither us nor our situation. One of the worst among them was Dr. Mengele, the Camp Doctor I have mentioned before. When a batch of newly arrived Jews was being classified into those fit for work and those fit for death, he would whistle a melody and rhythmically jerk his thumb over his right or his left shoulder—which meant "gas" or "work". He thought conditions in the camp rotten, and even did a few things to improve them, but at the same time he committed murder callously, without any qualms. His interest was centred on his anthropological research on Jewish twins. He would always single out and keep alive such pairs of twins when he was on duty at selections for the gas chamber. He probably also knew that we cheated him and presented brothers or sisters with a strong family likeness as "dis-similar twins". In the summer of 1944 he often looked regretfully at the scientific material he had collected with the help of a large staff of prisoner-collaborators, and said with a laugh: "What a pity it will fall into the hands of the Bolsheviks!"

I once had a personal conversation with him. He asked me why I was in camp; I recited my formula, and added that I had been duped by a spy who had promised me to take some Jews across the frontier. He shook his head and asked:

"But how could you be so silly as to believe that a thing like that would come off?"

"Why not?" I answered. "There were quite a lot of cases of people who managed it with money."

"Yes, of course we sell some Jews, we should be idiots if we didn't."

"Well," I said, "I simply hoped that you people would sell those Jews too."

"All right; but why did you go in for such things? What was the good of it—now you're sitting here!"

Not a word about "treason against the German State" or "offence against racial honour". Stupid as insults of that kind would have been, they would at least have indicated an ideology of sorts. But to him it was just bad business.

This insolent moral apathy which did not bother to camouflage itself with phrases existed in the highest quarters. Once I had a brief conversation with a man from Himmler's private staff. One of my patients was involved in an unsavoury affair which had just been discovered. She was supposed to have been the mistress of Hoess, the former Camp Commandant, and it was alleged that he had sent her into the "water bunker"—the water-filled cell—when she was pregnant, and kept her there for nine days to get rid of her and the child as well. She was lying in my hospital hut with an inflammation of the marrow of the bones, probably a tubercular process. All the same, she was such a liar and so vague that it was never possible to gauge the veracity of her romantic tales, although everything she said was possible in camp conditions. Probably Commandant and prisoner had been worthy of each other. Rumours of the affair reached Berlin, presumably through one of the cronies of Hoess, and an investigation on the highest level was started. The patient was carried into the room of the Hut Senior and interrogated there. On this occasion Himmler's private assistant asked me, by the way, why I was in the camp. When he heard about my crime he too showed no indignation, but asked in the manner of a reporter: "And are you very unhappy here?"

If I had hoped that it would do any good, and he would help me, I should have swallowed my pride and my revulsion, I should have spoken of my despair and my boundless longing for freedom, home and family. But I knew those men only too well. I knew he asked not out of human compassion, but out of sensationalism, so to speak, with the idea of studying the psychology of prisoners.

I felt disinclined to supply him with material. Therefore I shrugged my shoulders and said, outwardly dispassionate: "Oh well, you know, I see it like this: it's like skiing. One is caught by an avalanche, and the other isn't. No skier gets upset about it." As soon as I had said this, I felt frightened. I wondered if the man would interpret it as an act of insolence, as proof of my lack of respect for Germany's legal system, that I compared those measures of punishment with the working of a blind, unjust force of nature. I had over-rated his convictions. He was not offended, but gave me an encouraging nod and said: "There you are, that's the right way of looking at it, and you'll stick it through like this." Afterwards my patient told me that he had advised her to be calmer and adopt my point of view.

They had, after all, little faith in their own measures—as little as in their own speeches. They hardly thought it worth while to put up a façade. What they wanted was power and the riches power ensures—nothing else. They were even proud of their frankness, those cynics; proud of their strength, which refused to don an ideological cloak; they appeared so very clever, so very superior in their own eyes—and they were so stupid that they were hurtling to perdition without ever seeing it.

Yet when stupidity is allied with power, the most terrible things are bound to happen until both together are defeated.

CHAPTER NINE

INTERLUDE

THE EVENTS of July 20th, 1944—the date of the unsuccessful attempt on Hitler's life—gave us the feeling that liberation was only a question of hours. The disappointment that followed it made the continued imprisonment almost unbearable, and yet the next stage seemed to pass incredibly quickly. We lived from one piece of news in the Press or on the radio to the next; all apathy had gone; we knew that whoever could stick it out now would have a chance to live again. Only—would the end come now, or should we have to face another long, merciless winter in camp, with its damp, cold and overcrowded hospital wards? It would be a winter, not even in our familiar camp, which by now had become relatively clean and orderly, but a winter threatening us with evacuation to another overcrowded camp in the midst of snow and cold. In the old camp we had by now proper paths, even edged with a strip of lawn; all the huts had at least cemented floors; some of the rooms had decent white-painted furniture. For some time there had been very few new arrivals, and one was grateful that life was a little more tolerable in spite of everything. Then came the Warsaw Rising. Twenty-five thousand women came to us from the evacuated city, and conditions again became chaotic. But even this influx was relatively quickly absorbed; every day transports left for munition factories, again we had to part from many people of whom we had grown fond.

Then came another alarming symptom: all the German prisoners, apart from a few who had special duties, were scheduled to leave. More and more anxiously we wondered what was to become of us. The camp doctor had given me the job of working out a list of all patients who were still just fit for transport. All those able to move at all implored me to put their names down. Those who had to stay in the camp went in fear of their lives. Dr. Koenig came to look at the women, and they begged him to take them along. "But," he soothed the pitifully weak patients, "there wouldn't be any sense in that. You couldn't survive the journey."

"If you can tell the women that those who stay here won't be killed off, they won't pester you so," I whispered to him.

"Don't talk such nonsense," he whispered back.

But he was not prepared to make the statement for which I had asked him.

After everything I had seen those people do, it was obvious to me that of their own free will they would never allow prisoners with sane perceptions, who had witnessed the whole thing up to the last, to leave the extermination camps alive. Not for a second did I doubt that Himmler's last decree would order the extermination of all inmates of concentration camps. It became increasing torture to think that one would be finished off at the very end, after having gone through all this, and that the anguish of the past years would have been in vain. Once I had timidly asked the Medical N.C.O. Flagge in Babice whether the S.S. would not bump us all off at the very last moment. Gravely and firmly he had answered: "No, there are too many among us who would never allow such a thing, and they would prevent it." Doubtless he spoke with honest conviction as far as he himself was concerned; but I wondered whether he was not, after all, under-rating the number of those S.S. men who were determined to go to any extreme. People of Flagge's type of mind used to think before 1933 that there were too many people in Germany who would never permit Hitler. . . .

The day after the list for the transport had been drawn up, Dr. Koenig came to me again and said angrily: "Usually you are quite a sensible person. How can you frighten your patients with such senseless rumours?"

Of course it was typical: it was I, not he, who had frightened the patients!

I retorted, "Well, *won't* you shoot us, when the Russians come?"

Again he evaded the issue: "What do you mean, the Russians? Where do you see Russians?" My question was left unanswered.

Shortly afterwards we were told that we had to evacuate the camp as it was too big and needed too many guards; we were to move into the filthy camp formerly occupied by the gypsies. So we went. The very sick women, many of them still with a high temperature, were piled helter-skelter into lorries, eighty to one hundred at a time. Two lorries moved 3,000 patients, plus the medical staff, in a single afternoon. Well, we would manage again somehow.

Next morning when I went out into the camp road, exhausted from the strain and excitement of the move, I happened to meet the Camp Senior. She asked for my number, looked at a piece of paper, and said: "You're for Dachau; solitary transport; nine o'clock at the Central Office."

For months I had been waiting to leave this place of horrors,

and now the day had come. Of course, I had hoped to leave it for freedom. Now I was in for Dachau, all by myself. I had to part from dear friends and to start from the beginning again, in another camp. And one was so weary. At first I felt nothing but fright and apprehension. But everything had to be done in a mad rush. It was eight o'clock. Pack the most necessary things—put on as many clothes as possible (I had a correct hunch that my ridiculously small box would be ransacked when I left; in fact the wardress did not even leave me a towel or a nightdress)—a bit of food for the journey—a hasty good-bye to the few fellow-prisoners who happened to be about—and then I stood in the office in front of the camp doctor.

"No question of your leaving," he said. "I've been told nothing, and in any case I have too few doctors to keep things going here: that's an arbitrary interference by the Camp Command."

Apparently, then, he counted me among his assets. I felt positively sought after. But then I thought the matter over quickly.

The Allied advance in the West had been halted temporarily at the West Wall; presumably the Russians would be in Auschwitz before the British and Americans reached Dachau. To stay in Auschwitz meant a chance of getting free sooner. But if the Russians were to come much earlier, while the war still lasted, it might mean evacuation, after all, and the wearisome way from one camp to the other, in extreme misery, cold and hunger. Better to be in the centre of things, where the end of the concentration camp was bound to mean the end of the war itself. Again, my Polish friends had repeatedly assured me that I should be safe with them, but could I know in what situation I should find myself if I were to try to escape rather than go with the evacuation transport? I could see myself wandering alone in the forests of Poland, in mid-winter, hardly knowing the language. By contrast, Dachau sounded familiar, almost like home. Besides, I had studied for some time in Munich, I had friends there who might in the last resort give me shelter; there I knew the roads and paths, and the Austrian frontier was near. Suddenly I remembered something else: a relative of mine was a director at the Siemens Works in Munich; many of the Siemens workshops employed prisoners; perhaps my family had found ways and means of bringing me where freedom was within reach?

"Well, I'll settle the matter; you stay here," said Dr. Mengele again.

I still had a brief struggle with my conscience. I had promised my patients that I would stand by them to the end. Perhaps it was wrong, but the thought of coming somewhat nearer to my

country, to be able at least to see my beloved Austrian mountains from afar, was stronger than everything else.

I took courage and said: "Please, Herr *Hauptsturmführer*, let me go all the same."

He wanted to know why.

I had found out that Dachau itself was only a men's camp, so that the only place where I could possibly go was to one of the working-parties of Dachau at a munitions factory. This strengthened my hope of getting to Siemens. I made another attempt:

"One of my husband's cousins is a director at Siemens, there; perhaps I can get my release through him. Please let me leave here."

Our Chief Doctor, who was standing beside Dr. Mengele, gave me an imploring look: she considered it sheer madness on my part to lay my cards on the table. But I was right in my assessment of the man; at bottom it was all the same to him. He shrugged his shoulders:

"If that's what you think, I don't want to stand in the way of your happiness."

So it was settled. I was to leave. Later it turned out that all my conjectures had been wrong. The Commandant of the factory camp at Munich was a very busy man, who was maddened by the fact that he had been given a French woman doctor for a working party consisting almost entirely of Polish and Dutch prisoners, so that neither he nor the majority of the prisoners themselves were able to communicate with her. He had applied to the S.S. Head Office in Berlin which dealt with the medical staff for concentration camps, and asked for a German woman doctor. When he was told that none was available, he attempted to "organise" one for himself, independently; he wrote to a friend who worked in the man-power office at Auschwitz and who, in reality, had nothing to do with the posting of women doctors, but nevertheless wanted to do his friend a favour. Without asking the Camp Doctor, he simply allotted me to his friend in Dachau. In this unromantic way my transfer from Dachau came to pass.

Though I imagined I had long been resigned to my fate, I was only too ready to clutch at every straw in my hope of liberation.

So I stood in front of the gate, ready for departure. On the same day 500 Poles, all of them men, were being sent to Dachau in exchange for 500 Frenchmen. Even though the Reich railway system was at that time strained to the utmost, prisoners were blithely pushed around all over the Reich; those whose home was in the West were sent to the East, and the other way round, from the same considerations which made it seem desirable to me

to be not in Auschwitz, but in Dachau, when the end came. If the men's transport had not left on this particular day, I should have travelled in an ordinary passenger coach, escorted only by a wardress, and should even have passed through Vienna. But I was unlucky.

Camp Commandant Schwarz, one of the worst of our S.S. men, came to see the transport off, looked me up and down and then said casually: "All right, stick her in with them!"

That meant that I was to travel for days on end, a single woman among 500 men, most of whom had not seen a woman for years and who were cooped up in cattle-trucks sixty and eighty at a time.

I am a doctor, and no longer very young, and I am not easily frightened; but that was too much for me. Somewhat confused, I stood on the railway platform in front of the train. I had been told to get in somewhere, and nobody bothered about me any more. I made up my mind, walked straight to the first cattle-truck, which was reserved for the S.S. and asked the leader of the transport to let me travel with the S.S. It is not quite clear to me why this seemed a safer thing to do. I do not believe that it was because I preferred to be with "compatriots"—on the contrary. I just told myself that I would have more room in a truck with twenty men than with eighty, and that these S.S. men had possibly been more recently with their wives or sweethearts. I also counted on a certain military discipline among them, and on the fact that there would be secret rebels there, as in all S.S. units, who would if necessary protect me.

Reality left my expectations far behind. I travelled for five days and four nights with these eighteen S.S. men through Czechoslovakia and Bavaria. They lit a small stove, cooked soup and made tea, shared their food with me and brought me newspapers. During the night we slept on cellulose fibre. One of them lent me his section of tent so that I was not cold. We got more and more filthy, as it was not possible to wash; I had the worst problem, because there was no lavatory and the train did not stop at stations, so that I had to climb on to the open coal-truck next to us. But apart from this and other discomforts, it was not disagreeable; it was the sort of life American hobos might lead. All the time I listened to the men talking, and had long conversations with every one of them. Among those eighteen S.S. men there were exactly three genuine Nazis: one was the leader of the transport, a Customs official with a great dislike for "scum", who maintained that Germany must and would win the war because it simply could not be that the "scum" should be free to make mischief; the second was a German national from Rumania, a former

factory worker who had set up a carpenter's shop with his wife's small dowry, and now realised that he would lose the shop unless Germany won; the third was a young boy with an impediment in his speech, who believed that a man could show his masculinity only in war. With the exception of the first two who were N.C.O.s in the S.S., all the others were ordinary rankers: an elderly father of a large family, a young worker from Vienna, two men from the Rhineland who had been degraded for insubordination, a Berlin photographer, etc. Like myself, they were all waiting for the end.

There I also met a Socialist comrade from Innsbruck, an old member of the Austrian Workers' Militia, the *Schutzbund*, and of the printer's trade union, one of the best unions in pre-Fascist days. He had been twice in prison, in 1934 and 1938. Then he had been called up to the German army, wounded, declared unfit for service at the front, incorporated into the "Homeland Army", placed with his whole company under Himmler's command after July 20th, transferred to the S.S., and posted on guard duty in concentration camps. His horror at seeing Auschwitz had been indescribable. Out of the same considerations as myself, he had tried every device at least to get transferred to Dachau: from there it was not far to Tirol.

This man did more for me than merely giving me half his food rations, his leather gloves, his pocket knife—in short, everything he could spare and I could use extremely well—more even than arranging for my mail to go to Vienna. He guessed my real state of mind, and he comforted me: "You can be sure, Comrade, it will be over by March at the latest." It was at the beginning of December, 1944. "Try to find out in Dachau where I am stationed, and I will also try to communicate with you, so you can get help from me at the end." Nothing came of it, because he was sent to the front at the last moment. Anyhow, he might have had more help from me than I from him. But at the time his words gave me courage.

I felt very miserable. I stood by the open door of the truck and looked out into the sunlit fields; for the first time for nearly two years I saw houses, gardens, school-children, peasants quite close; I journeyed through the pleasant, rolling countryside of Czechoslovakia, past the towns. I had almost forgotten that all that existed. Sometimes, in the midst of my work in the camp, I had caught myself thinking: "Have I really got a home and a child, or haven't I?" The letters from outside—those meagre fifteen lines we were allowed to get once a month—seemed to come from an unreal country far away. And suddenly all this came painfully close once again, as though I had only to put out my hand

to grasp the world and life. I could easily have escaped innumerable times during this journey. But where should I have gone? I could not go home to my family. And should I hide, quite alone, among strangers, without money, food or papers? Should I bring danger upon others? If only one had known for how long! And supposing one was caught again and sent back to prison? I had no urge to be beaten up.

Then I thought of my friends in Auschwitz camp. Under the pressure of a concentration camp you grew more closely attached to people than you would have done otherwise in such a short time; then, suddenly, you were cut off from all the people who had been so near to you. In normal life, too, relationships are often severed, but usually it is a slow process. There are visits, letters are exchanged, until the contact is loosened and new links replace the old ones. But for the prisoner a transfer means that everything around him is suddenly wiped out, 'swallowed as though by an abyss, so that he has no possibility whatever of hearing from his friends; and his abysmal loneliness, his longing for human contacts, is brought home to him by pain.

The life I had led in those days was a life between imprisonment and liberty. And, after this, was I to go back once more into the camp with its hated coercion, back once more behind barbed wire? The thought seemed unbearable to me, and the last night before we were due to arrive I cried bitterly. When we said good-bye, the friend and comrade said to me: "I could not help you much, but it would make me glad if you had the feeling during these last few days that you were not alone." Rarely have I been so grateful to any human being as to him.

Dachau at dusk, the journey through the little town where I had cycled as a student, past the villas of the S.S. men to the camp, which looked so different from Auschwitz, with the neatly kept drive, the encircling walls and moat, the lodge with the big gate like a mediæval fortress. I was taken to the "bunker"—the prison building—which struck my unspoilt eyes as being rather like a better-class sports hotel. At that time the gaol sheltered the notables among the prisoners—German industrialists, foreign officers, later also Schuschnigg, Schacht, Blum and the other well-known politicians. I took my exercise in the yard at the same time as a senior British officer, Colonel MacGrath. Every time our paths crossed we exchanged a few words in English.

"Where do you come from?"

"From England."

I really wanted to know from which town he came, but that did not matter.

"Let's hope there'll soon be more of you here . . ."

He nodded confidently, sure of himself, and you could see that he knew the others would soon follow.

Then the guard noticed our conversation and separated us. In the evening the prisoner who was distributing the meal handed me a whole parcel from Col. MacGrath: white bread, soap, vitamin tablets, a coloured handkerchief which I still have. The first greetings from the Allies!

I had newspapers and books, I could take warm baths and have my hair cut by a real ladies' hairdresser, and for the first time in years I enjoyed something I had greatly missed—I had a room to myself. Since the day of my arrest I had not been alone for a second, neither when I was reading, nor when I was sleeping, nor when I was eating, nor when I was in the lavatory: always you were one among many. And though the others were friends, comrades, you still longed to be alone, as you long for a great happiness.

Three days later I was fetched by a wardress; we took the train to Munich, travelling among the ordinary passengers. There I saw the appalling destruction the war had caused to the beautiful city. During an air-raid alarm I took refuge in a public shelter with the wardress, saw all the pale, tired people, and for the first time had an inkling of the life they led—a life I had not come to know in Vienna before my arrest. Laboriously we made our way to the Tegernsee Road in Munich-East. It was so dark that you could not see your hand before your face. Repeatedly the wardress asked: "Are you still there?" and clutched my arm. She did not know her way, got lost, and for hours we wandered through blacked-out Munich. Again I could easily have escaped; again the same reasons I had worked out on the train made me stay. And so we came to the next stage in my concentration camp life.

CHAPTER TEN

WOMEN'S WORKING PARTY

LATE AT night we reached a large, unfinished building which reminded me of the municipal blocks of flats in Vienna. It had been planned by the German Labour Front as a tenement house for workers, and in fact it had many civilian inhabitants. One wing of the building, together with its courtyard, had been separated in primitive fashion from the rest by barbed wire; it housed a factory working-party of prisoners: approximately 300 Polish women, 200 Dutch women, as well as a few women from Yugoslavia and Belgium, a single German apart from myself, the Commandant of the women's working-party, his deputy, some ten wardresses under a sort of Head Wardress, and a few elderly men who belonged to the factory guard. The structure of the building was fairly solid, it had windows and doors which shut reasonably well, and moreover, w.c.s. The women lived in three-roomed flats. Of course the doors to the flats could not be locked, but, even so, this type of accommodation had some sort of privacy. The furniture consisted of double-tiered bunks, a few wooden tables and stools, and the rooms, especially those on the ground floor, which had no floor-boards, were so damp that one could scratch the mildew off the walls in the corners. It was on the ground floor that the sick-bay was installed. In the courtyard there was also quite a decent hut with a large kitchen and a roomy canteen. All in all, I felt as though I had returned to civilisation.

There was no electrified wire, only barbed wire. The tram passed close by, we walked through the streets of Munich to the factory—the Agfa Camera Works—or to fetch potatoes, and once we even had to go right into town to fetch a barrel of beer which the firm had presented to us for Christmas, and which we had to roll home. On Sundays we were allowed to go for walks with the wardresses; again I saw the Autobahn, now neglected and pit-marked, along which I had so often cycled to the Schliersee in my student days. When the wardresses felt cold we would sit down in a beer-garden, and they would even invite us to a glass of beer, on condition that we did not tell tales to the Commandant. In short, superficially the prevailing atmosphere was free and easy, more reminiscent of a girls' boarding-school than of a concentration camp. Only grown-up women who have children

at home may be chafed by staying in a "boarding school". Nor was it difficult to escape. Once a young Russian woman lifted up the barbed wire in the courtyard at midday and slipped out unseen. The wardresses who were sent out to look for her went to a café as soon as they were out of sight, as one of them told me later and returned after two hours with the information that they could not find her. Three days later, however, the girl reported to the police of her own accord, because she was without food and did not know where to go. A young Dutch woman, who was released from the concentration camp but called up for labour service, also came back on a visit and asked the Commandant for permission to live with us again because conditions in the town were not much better, and she wanted at least to be together with her friends. One could really say that conditions of life in such a factory camp were at that time not very different from those of civilian life—which does not mean praise! Not that our life was like normal life; the so-called normal life had come to be like ours. The whole of Germany had been turned into a single huge concentration camp.

And our life, too, only appeared to be "free and easy". We had a few cases of typhoid fever, of scarlet fever and tuberculosis, and for those patients our damp, cold ward was quite unsuitable. Bed linen was seldom changed, there were no night-dresses, not enough towels and correspondingly much scabies. The women went hungry. As they were torn away from their surroundings at home and had no news of their people, work in the factory made them extremely nervous. Also they suffered from cold; there were not nearly enough blankets and almost no fuel.

Most of the Poles had been evacuated after the Warsaw Rising. They were not insurgents, but simply women who had been carried off, whether for military reasons or in reprisal; in the main they were not politically conscious, and had never done any active political work. Altogether, the Polish women were practically always more remote from party politics than those from the West; but they very quickly grasped some of the exigencies of camp life, such as the need for solidarity in the face of the S.S., the strict ban on denunciation, the necessity for ordering their lives apart from and even in opposition to, the camp regulations. A great part of the Dutch women behaved quite differently. They were active fighters who knew what they were doing; but at the same time most of them were religiously and ethically, rather than politically, conscious. Those women had even here preserved something of the outlook of a free people of peasants and merchants; they defended their rights as free human beings with the forthright energy and the puritanism their forebears may have

shown in the times when they founded the small Dutch settlements in the New World. At the same time, however, they often showed a rather rigid innocence and ingenuousness in the face of the totally different and unprecedented situation in which they found themselves in the concentration camps. Among them I found for the first time many other women who were imprisoned for the same "offence" as myself. Every other one was detained for "aiding and abetting" Jews, for procuring false papers for them, for hiding Jewish children, and so forth. In their attitude they were strangely intransigent, and very often clashed with the Polish women because of the latter's principle of live and let live.

The Commandant dismissed the Polish Camp Senior and put a young Dutch nurse in her place, because he counted on the Dutch correctness. Naturally there was pilfering in this working party as everywhere else. Once the new Dutch Camp Senior said to the Commandant: "Please have the cellar windows wired—you should not lead the women into the temptation of stealing potatoes." I often argued with her about it. She was of the opinion that it was wrong for some women to steal and eat their fill, while others ate the thin soup and went hungry. I, on the other hand, took the part of the Poles and, incidentally, of a considerable number of the Dutch women, who thought that, once there were no potatoes left, the Commandant would have to get a new store from the factory three days earlier than had been scheduled, because, after all, he could not make soup out of nothing. In this way the few buckets of potatoes which we filched from him would be a gain all round, and more than offset the danger of demoralisation. The Dutch girl could not accept this line of argument; it would have made her feel as though she had given up something which was infinitely valuable and even vital to her.

One Sunday morning, when it was 27° Fahrenheit below freezing-point, the Commandant ordered all the women to line up in the courtyard: a sausage which he had bought as a Christmas present for his wife, allegedly from his saved ration stamps, had been stolen from the kitchen. He called in the prisoners one by one and searched them; apparently he was naïve enough to believe that the sausage had not been eaten immediately. The women were left standing out in the cold with utterly insufficient underclothing or stockings.

After two hours I could not bear to watch it any more, and suggested to the Camp Senior: "Let's report to him and say we did it. He won't do much to us because, after all, we are indispensable to him. The main thing is to stop this standing about in the snow."

She did not agree, not because she would have been too cow-

ardly or not willing to stand up for her comrades, but because she had quite a different point of view, still rooted in civilian life. "No," she said, "the main thing is to find the thieves; after all, it won't do for all of us to go round being suspected of having done it." True, she came from a country where the tradesmen leave their goods in front of unguarded doors, while I came from Auschwitz. There was something impressive about her attitude, but in its effect it was pointless, and it provoked the resentment of the Poles.

At first I had an easy time in Munich, but, even so, the cramped conditions, the comparative lack of work and the boredom depressed me. On my arrival the Commandant had shaken hands with me and told me how very pleased he was that I had come, that he hoped for good collaboration, and that I should be completely independent. Anything of the kind always made me sceptical. And I was right. In reality he interfered in everything, left no one in peace, was highly suspicious, given to hysterical outbursts of anger, and we never agreed on the guiding principles of my work. I used to give a permit to stay in bed to all women who, in my opinion, were unfit to go to the factory, whether for reasons of general physical debility or nervous over-strain. Thus there were always between forty and sixty women absent from work—that is to say, fully ten per cent. of the total. He let me have my way because he had to; my only superior in medical matters was the camp doctor of Dachau, and this fact he had to recognise. The main reason was that he could not run the risk of sending really ill women to the factory. The Staff Manager would have put the blame on him if some of them had collapsed at work. After all, the firm footed the bill, and expected healthy women, capable of putting in a good day's work, in return for their money. I always left the Commandant in the dark as to who was really ill and who in my view had to be spared strain. He only hoped that the camp doctor would catch me out during a surprise inspection. He thought it was as simple as that, while in fact no doctor can prove another wrong when he says that, say, an ovarian tumour had been palpable the previous day, and that, after its dispersal to-day, the patient needed another three days in bed. Apart from this, the camp doctor of Dachau had worries other than a few women prisoners in Munich. He had little petrol for his car, the train service was constantly interrupted, in Dachau camp itself a typhus epidemic had broken out, and the doctor had not the slightest intention of coming to Munich for no good reason whatever. In practice I was left free to do what I liked, and this fact drove my Commandant into a frantic rage. The tension between us grew more and more acute.

Once again he tried the method of tempting me with promises. Out of the blue he turned up and asked me whether I had had any special privileges in Auschwitz; he was ready to treat me as a privileged prisoner in his camp, too. Those S.S. people were used to being able to buy anybody with a piece of bread-and-butter. It would have meant for me the right to send more post home, to go for walks by myself outside the camp with only a wardress, and to get S.S. food rations. I asked him, as I always did on such occasions, to be allowed to send a special letter to my little boy at home; the Commandant himself brought me coloured pencils and posted the letter. I was not interested in the S.S. rations. A patient of mine from Auschwitz, whom I had pulled through typhus, was working in the S.S. kitchen, and she brought me food from there anyway. It hardly tempted me to take walks, with only a wardress, through the ruins of Munich. Apart from all this, I considered that what I was doing was professionally correct. I preferred not to assume that he wanted to induce me to an incorrect procedure. So things stayed as they were.

Slowly I even acquired a sort of civilian practice. A worker had an accident on a nearby building site, a woman had a foreign body in her eye—the medical service among the civilian population had completely collapsed, there was no doctor within reach who could have helped, and the first-aid ambulance, if it could be reached at all, arrived hours later. The people in the neighbourhood timidly approached the Commandant and asked him to let them consult me—something which he found difficult to refuse. Another group of patients came to me secretly: the wardresses. It was strictly forbidden, but they had various pains and ailments, and were not inclined to make the journey to Dachau to the S.S. doctor for every little thing. One day, when I had again given one of them some drops of belladonna to relieve her stomach pains, and she asked me for goodness' sake not to tell the Commandant, I asked her why not. "We've been told we mustn't take anything from you, you might poison us." Those people believed us capable of anything they themselves were ready to do.

Once a wardress fell ill with scarlet fever. It was not diagnosed as such, and she was left lying in bed among her colleagues, without any treatment. They sent another wardress to me to inquire what could be the matter with her, as she had a temperature of 103° F. and a sore throat. I told them that I could not give an opinion about a patient I had never seen. But the Commandant stuck to his guns, and they were not allowed to fetch me. Finally, when the Commandant happened not to be in the building, the S.S. doctor from Dachau turned up, sent for me and asked me for

God's sake to see to it another time that a woman with an infectious illness was isolated. I assured him that I was perfectly ready to do so, and passed his instruction on to the Commandant, who countered it with a furious: "Out of the question!"

The prisoners of our working party were employed in a factory twenty minutes away which belonged to the I.G. Farben. It had formerly produced cameras and had been switched to the production of clockwork for time-bombs during the war. The work was not really heavy, but it was nerve-destroying, mainly because it was work on a conveyor belt. There was one great advantage about it: the production process demanded an absolutely even, not too low temperature in the workshops. For this reason the women at least did not suffer from cold while they were working. Whenever the windows of the factories were smashed by blast during an air raid—which happened continually—work had to be stopped, even though the factory had not received a direct hit. In fact, the prisoners were more often at home than in the workshops, which on the other hand had the disadvantage for us that we then received no newspapers from the civilian workers. As winter advanced the raw material shortage increased, and in the end there was no longer any need for me to hand out bed chits, as most of the women stayed at home in any case. Thus the prisoners' total output was very low, and the I.G. Farben had to register them as a definite loss. Not unnaturally, the firm was not very anxious to go to great expense on their behalf. It was always complaining to the Commandant about the low quantity and quality of the prisoners' output. He in turn found himself forced to become a "representative of the workers' interests", without knowing how it had happened. He would declare: "It's disgusting! Such a wealthy combine, and they're not even ready to pay bonuses to the women! Just let them fork out, then the women will want to work all right!"

However absurd this situation was, it was still more absurd that this idea of his was justified by the facts. There were indeed women—and they were in the majority—who were induced to work more quickly by the prospect of a bonus which would entitle them to buy a silly little notebook or an evil-smelling skin-cream, and who quite forgot what they were doing and for whom. Whoever counted on the women's revolutionary will and spirit to resist was in truth a worse psychologist than the Commandant. Yet, that spirit and that will were there as well, and when they broke through it was with a frighteningly sudden explosive force. One of those unexpected outbursts once nearly cost me my head.

The supply situation in Munich had grown steadily worse; the air raids again and again destroyed the supply lines. What

had been repaired one day was destroyed the next. The civilians lived in cellars, spent hours walking to the place where they worked, and found no warm food when they came home in the evenings. The Head Wardress insisted: "We shall win the war, even if we have to dig ourselves in with our bare hands." She had lost her husband and two sons during the war, and considered that this sacrifice should not have been asked of her for nothing. We were pleased at the way things were going, but at the same time we felt the consequences most, and the women had little reserve of strength, although only very few of them had been imprisoned for long. We followed developments at the front with burning interest. We knew it could not last long, and that helped us to carry on. Aachen was the first German town to be occupied, but it was still outside the West Wall. Towards Christmas, when the factory windows were once again under repair and we were left without newspapers, the Commandant suddenly said: "The counter-offensive has started, the German troops are advancing into the Eifel." It took our breath away. Would the new weapon, after all . . . ? We had no means of checking whether he was telling a lie. In the last analysis everything was already decided, it could not have been otherwise; and yet we were immeasurably depressed. Another reverse? More precious weeks lost? It seemed unbearable. And just as that piece of news made us feel downcast and despairing against all sense and reason, it may well have filled the Nazis in Germany with new life and hope, also against all sense and reason. .

The Commandant made strenuous efforts to secure our food supplies, but he was not always successful. He was indignant because his good will did not impress the women more, and because dissatisfaction among them grew. In January the salt stocks were exhausted, and for three days we got unsalted, thin soup which was quite unpalatable.

This was too much for the Dutch women, and they went on strike. One of them switched off the conveyor belt. They crossed their arms, and when the Commandant went from one to the other, completely beside himself, asking why they were not working, he was given the answer: "Because we don't want to any more." The Polish women, with their more sober sense of reality, did not join in, but went on working like the civilian workers who were watching and wondering. A strike in a munition factory, a strike of concentration camp prisoners! It was something completely unheard of, something which had never happened before in the long history of concentration camps—at least, so the Commandant told us. Indeed, it was only made possible by the naïve innocence of these women, who had acted on a sudden

impulse and had not thought out the risk it involved for them. In Holland, before the German occupation, the workers' right to strike had been recognised. They did not admit that the Nazis had a right to take it from them, so they simply went on strike, come what might. Presumably only women are capable of such conduct. When I was told about it in the sick-bay, my hair stood on end, and I waited anxiously for the consequences. I had no inkling at that time that the results would touch me so nearly.

The Commandant wrote down the names of the fifteen Dutch women who might have been the organisers, and said that he would wait three days to be told the name of the instigator of the strike, failing which those fifteen. . . . He did not pronounce any definite threat, but it was clear that one would have to reckon with the worst, although the matter concerned women. Even simple civilian workers would have been executed for striking, so what could concentration camp workers expect in January, 1945?

We were all caught in an atmosphere of gloom and depression. The women were frightened at their own courage. But work went on as though nothing had happened, even the soup was salted again and considerably less thin. On the morning of the third day I was called to the Commandant. He received me with the following words: "Four of the Poles have been to me and told me that you said the calorie content of the prisoners' food was so low that they were bound to die within four months, and that this made the women so desperate that they started this wild strike. So we have to consider you as the wire-puller of the whole affair!" At the same time a triumphant grin spread over his foolish face. At last he had got hold of something which would help him to catch me out and liquidate me! Simultaneously he had got rid of the silly strike affair, for personally he was not really blood-thirsty, and he certainly felt no urge to have all the fifteen women killed off.

The story about the four Polish women was obviously nonsense. None of the Poles would ever have denounced me, least of all in a matter which did not concern their compatriots. Once I had told the Dutch Camp Senior and a few other prisoners that in Auschwitz the ordinary women prisoners invariably died of starvation within four months, if they did not die otherwise. I had also said that, according to my assessment of the calorie content of our food, one had to reckon on a monthly loss of weight of one to two pounds. It was perfectly possible, with some good will, to construe something ominous out of my remarks. Moreover, I had demonstrated on every possible occasion that I was firmly determined to stand no nonsense, and I had tried to create as much will to resist as possible in the others. I could no longer bear the sight of

those S.S. uniforms. On Christmas Eve a few Dutchwomen had invited me to a little party, for which they had prepared something vaguely reminiscent of sandwiches—bread they had saved, a little jam and carrots. When I came into their room, I saw the Commandant sitting beside the Camp Senior. The women had invited him, in housewifely pride at their achievement. It may have been childish of me, but it made me sick; I turned on my heel and left the room. Outside I said to a young girl who wanted to fetch me back: "Do what you like, but either you invite me or the Commandant." I was so irritated that I said what came into my head, all of which certainly reached his ears. There was a grain of truth in the accusation that I and others like me had been the intellectual instigators, or at least that we had created the necessary frame of mind. But if I had been asked, I should certainly have advised against so dangerous a demonstration. Perhaps it could have been organised in such a way that many women collapsed at work and pretended to faint; but a strike was sheer suicide.

As a matter of fact, the connection between my words and the strike was rather remote, seen objectively, and I should not have viewed my situation with too much pessimism had it not been that I was already on the black list, so that the Commandant was given his coveted chance of ending the latent state of war between us in his own favour, to take his revenge on me, and to get his own back for my open contempt for himself and his enticements. In the circumstances the affair might well finish me off.

It was evident that only Dutch women could have denounced me, and that the Commandant had promised not to give away their names. Therefore he refused my demand to be confronted with the "Poles", and I was at the mercy of whatever women (whose names I did not know) had reported me.

I tackled a young girl who had been mentioned to me as the probable denouncer, and asked her when we were alone: "Now tell me, why did you do it? I've always taken your side, I've covered up every one of you and freed as many of you as I could from work. So what's the reason?"

Embarrassed, she answered: "It wasn't me, but the women gave your name because you are the only German, and because they wanted to save their own people."

I stared at her aghast. Then I mumbled: "So that's why!"

I went back to my room, threw myself on the bed and gazed through the window at the green glow of the winter evening sky, cut by the sharp outline of the bomb-torn city. I felt neither emotion nor fear, neither sorrow nor hurt; everything in me was empty and dead. I was lying there with dry eyes and parched

mouth, incapable of thought, choked and crushed by a heavy burden. And I was infinitely lonely and deserted.

For months I had had no mail from home; the change of camp had cut all communication between me and my family. The letters which had reached me before that had not given me the feeling that they were waiting for me. It seemed as though there were nothing more to tie me to life except the memory of a little, fair-haired boy who was playing his childish games somewhere in a lonely mountain village, and no longer remembered his mother's face.

Now, when I had lived through so much, had escaped from so much, when the end was almost within reach—now I might not live to see it, might not be allowed to see my child again, because my own comrades had sacrificed me as the "only German!"

I was not long alone. Friends came and comforted me; they said it was a vile thing to do, and that they would bear witness for me. The three women of whom it was known that they had switched off the conveyor belt and started the strike—they, too, had been denounced by the four so-called Poles—declared they knew well enough themselves whether they were starved or not; they did not have to wait for my calorie calculations.

But the business had been started, and it went on. A Gestapo official appeared from Dachau and took down reams of statements from all of us; two over-fed S.S. canteen officials, whose girth could easily compete with Goering's, came to inspect our kitchen, and shouted at me that they would have me shot against the wall. Every day brought new excitements.

Then Herr Bach appeared—S.S. *Oberscharführer*, Interrogation Officer Bach, one of the most dreaded men of Dachau, who had had thousands of prisoners beaten, murdered, handed over to the hangman, the man who conducted the investigations into all the incidents which occurred in the camp, the real head of the Gestapo at Dachau. When I saw him, I was frightened, and gave up all hope for myself. He was a small, thin, neat little man, with a tiny moustache *à la* Adolphe Menjou over thin lips in a pallid face. His eyebrows formed a single straight line over small, shrewd eyes, whose icy look chilled you to the core. He asked a few short questions and said something about insubordination. Our Camp Senior was decent enough to cover me—at least, in so far as she said that she had heard me speak about the calories, but not about the certainty of death within four months.

"The whole thing is a very obscure affair. We shall see. I presume everything is put down in the statements," Bach said, drawing his brows together; and then he left.

I had not the faintest idea what was "put down" in those state-

ments, except in my own. So it meant waiting to see what they were going to do.

I did not yet give up the struggle, but I knew that only an improbable stroke of luck could help me. I got such a stroke of luck.

Among our wardresses there was a beautiful young girl. Perhaps her face was still a little vacuous, a doll's face, but her beauty and innocence were so complete and compelling that one could not help being glad whenever one looked at her. She was a person who certainly had only met with good things in her life, had never known anything but luxury, care and love, and who believed that it was the same everywhere in this world. She was the only daughter of a well-to-do bourgeois family; her parents had a sumptuous country house in the Isar valley—she was sure to have a room of her own there, with pale green wallpaper, white lace curtains and a little piano in a corner. Once she showed me a photo of the house where she had led a sheltered life, idolised by her parents. It had been a life which left no traces in her face. She was unbelievably young and silly; it seemed incredible that anybody like her existed in the Germany of 1945. And then this girl was called up for war service as an S.S. wardress. Her uncle once wrote her a desperate letter: what had she perpetrated, to be put into that criminals' uniform? There was nothing to be done; she had to start her service. And she carried it out in a touching manner. When she had to distribute soup in the factory, she gave such big portions to the first ones that no food was left for the last fifty. When she was on night shift, she did not make her control rounds, but sat down in my first-aid room, which was heated, and chatted with me. It was not as if she had been a revolutionary. She had no idea of what was happening in the country. Here she saw, for the first time in her life, women live and work under conditions the very existence of which had been unknown to her before, although they were not the worst possible ones. She looked round her like a babe in the wood.

During her service, which involved much standing about in the cold, she had contracted a painful chill of the bladder, and she had asked me to help her. I gave her sulphonamides for shock treatment, and within a few days she was freed from her trouble. It was not exactly a major medical achievement, but apparently the S.S. doctors had heard nothing of a sulphonamide therapy for cystitis; at any rate, she had not been given it, despite her frequent journeys to the doctors at Dachau. Now she was grateful to me and loved me, rather as a schoolgirl may adore her teacher. Perhaps I owe my life to this fact. The young, beautiful girl had not found a doctor to cure her in Dachau Camp, but she had found

an ardent admirer—Herr Bach. No doubt his taste was good. She was constantly invited to Dachau; he sent her flowers and lots of food, of which she always gave me a share. Just when he interrogated me, she turned up with a beautiful ring on her finger, and told me that she had got secretly engaged to Bach. I was aghast.

"But, my dear girl," I said, "do you know who that man is? Do you know that he's one of the most dangerous and endangered men of Dachau? You know the end is coming, his life is forfeit; and just now you want to tie yourself to him?"

It seemed right to me to speak ruthlessly, because I knew that she did not love the man. She had no inkling of real love, and was only blinded by his power; she had succumbed to his fascination, as a rabbit may to a snake, and was flattered by the thought that such a great, powerful man was at her feet.

"My goodness," she answered, "he told me he's not a real Nazi at all; he was called up for service just like me, and we like each other; he's from Freiburg, where I come from. He says I mustn't be afraid, and if it comes to the worst we'll die together."

I was staggered by the cold-blooded way in which that mass murderer lied to a young girl, merely to make her his mistress for a few weeks. And—I had to make use of it, because I had no option. So I asked her: "Help me to get out of the strike affair."

She was willing to do so, and assured me that she would not look at him again if he were to do me any harm. I do not know if this was the decisive argument, or whether the evidence against me was not sufficiently grave, so that I did not seem at all important to the man: in any case, he let me go scot free.

Other circumstances were favourable to all those of us who were involved in the affair. A report on the whole matter was sent to Berlin, where the punishment was to be decreed. At that time a normal letter to Berlin usually took six weeks, and the answer would take as long. The counter-blow against Kesselring's winter offensive had been launched. If there was no one to speed up the normal procedure, we could hope that the incident would be lost in the general turmoil. Apparently Herr Bach was not interested in speeding things up, and I never knew what Berlin decided in our case—thank God!

After this the atmosphere in our camp grew more peaceful, but I was rapidly going downhill. In Auschwitz the idea of death was no stranger to me. But this time it struck at my roots. Before the incident I was calm in my mind, afterwards I only tried hard to appear calm. In truth, I had become uncertain in the very depths of my being. I let myself in for provocative, incautious actions, in the feeling that it did not matter any more; then I was again

racked by fear. I could no longer sleep, and I hardly ate at all. After a few bites I had the sensation of being full up, even while my stomach was empty and I was nearly fainting from weakness. Once, when we left the shelter in the cellars after a heavy air raid—those were the first bombing raids I had experienced—I noticed that my pulse was irregular, and at times as rapid as 160 per minute. I had developed a typical neurosis of the heart: I had capitulated when I felt I was at the mercy of blind chance, human weakness and the insufficiency of my comrades.

Just then each of us felt the need of being armed for the end. The West Wall was not yet pierced, but the Russians were marching towards Berlin. Again and again we faced the anxious questions: in what fashion should we get through the finish? How should we survive it? Whenever I managed to dissociate myself from the fear for my personal fate, which that silly story had made so acute, I was harassed by fear of the fate waiting for all of us—the fate which actually overtook so many prisoners at the last moment. I never doubted Himmler's ultimate extermination order; the only question was, would the order be carried out? It depended on the individual S.S. men in the middle ranks. Therefore it was necessary to assess them with this in mind. With a very few exceptions, our wardresses would not do it, and the old men of the factory guard even less. The Commandant was at bottom a good-natured, hysterical person of whom one could not expect the worst. (In fact, I heard later that he had orders for the women to be taken to the Tyrol, in forced marches of twenty miles a day, and "if necessary pushed into the river Inn"—although I am by no means certain whether the latter version was not merely a product of the prisoners' fertile imagination. But some such thing may well have been envisaged. The Commandant took the women to Wolfratshausen; there it rained, he left them in a barn, dressed in civilian clothes and went off on his bike. On the following day the French came.)

In my opinion the Deputy Commandant was more dangerous. He was an *Unterscharführer* from Berlin, a sharp fellow with a bitter tongue, capable of anything, even of killing all the women in cold blood. Once I told him to his face what I feared of him, and he answered: "Your blood is too filthy for me to sully my hands with when we've won. And we'll win—anything else is out of the question." The phrase about our "filthy blood" sounded comforting in the event of a German victory—but if "anything else" was not out of the question? I asked my beautiful young friend to complain about him to Bach and to say that he was bothering her and making love to her. The man was a good, faithful husband, and I was doing him an injustice. But Bach was just as jealous

as I had expected him to be, and a fortnight later the other man was posted to the front. After our liberation in Dachau I wanted to show my practical gratitude to the young girl, and inquired about her fate, intending to make a statement in her favour if necessary. I was told that Bach had hidden in her room (by that time he had taken her into his Dachau office) and jumped out of the window when the Americans entered the door. She had been killed in the shooting which followed. I was unable to check on the report. Many stories were told, and not all of them were true; perhaps the woman in question was another of Bach's girl friends; but in itself the tale is not impossible. If it is true, Bach's last murder destroyed that radiant young woman, who had no knowledge of what she was doing.

But those preparations were not enough. Even in a less dramatic finish there existed the danger that the women, suddenly abandoned by the S.S., would flutter round like an excited brood of hens; some would loot the remaining food stocks, others would blunder into street fighting. Nobody was in a position to foresee all possible situations, and everything would depend on a few sensible women taking things in hand, keeping the others in order and perhaps securing food supplies for the few critical days. I believed in the necessity of building up an underground organisation among the prisoners, which should emerge at the given moment, but I was not able to do the work myself. I did speak to a few intelligent women and explained my plan to them; I asked them to find a few trustworthy people in every part of the house and keep them informed, but I refused to take an active part.

It was not that I lacked the will. When I thought over things quietly, I told myself that the way in which I seemed to have managed to get my head out of the noose justified, after the event, those who had thought it easiest for me, as the only German, to bear the brunt, since other women would not have had my opportunities. Nevertheless, they should at least have told me frankly about it, and should have asked me to co-operate. I should have been the last to refuse if it had been a question of going to the Commandant and mumbling something about a misunderstanding and a deficiency of calories. It would have had the same effect, and the danger to me would have been infinitely less; they had not the right simply to deliver me into the hands of the S.S. behind my back. But, after all, it was over and done with, and there was no point in chewing it over. Only now my hands were tied, for I had committed the worst crime anyone could commit in the Wehrmacht or in a concentration camp—I had made myself conspicuous.

They sent a spy to us, a girl who pretended to be from the Alsace, a medical student, and a niece of General de Gaulle. Oddly enough, she carried with her a whole suitcase full of clothes. By pure chance, one of the Frenchwomen in our camp knew General de Gaulle's real niece, Geneviève de Gaulle, who was detained in Ravensbrück Camp, and therefore we knew from the first day that my new assistant in the sick-bay was a spy. I treated her with velvet gloves, but I knew that every single one of my words and actions was being observed, and it bothered me.

Once I told her: "You know, I really took you for a spy."

I wanted to see her reaction.

She answered: "Honesty for honesty—they did order me to keep you under observation and report on you. They wanted to send me to a special punishment camp, and so I said I agreed. But don't worry, I would never report anything which could do you harm. I couldn't take it on myself to hurt the mother of a child, and anyhow, I'm very fond of you."

She put her arm round my neck and kissed me—and at the time I knew the text of the reports she had made against me to the Political Section of the camp!

There was no time to lose. My friends worked hard to set up a network of reliable underground workers, but they were not cautious enough, and hit upon another spy, a Yugoslav prostitute, who betrayed everything. Again there were investigations and interrogations, again I was near to being implicated, again it was impossible to prove anything against me, because my people kept absolute silence. But once again my name had been mentioned, and the situation grew more and more difficult for me. I realised that I should not be able to keep my end up; sooner or later I was bound to fall into a trap, even though it might be in some insignificant matter. In addition, I felt increasingly ill, old, and close to a nervous collapse.

If anyone had told me at an earlier stage that I would pull strings to get into Dachau Concentration Camp because it seemed my only salvation, I should have thought him a lunatic. But this was exactly what happened. In Dachau Camp I had friends, old Social Democrats from Vienna, who occupied the most important posts in the prison hospital. The Capo of the hospital, the kitchen supervisor, the dispenser, they all were Austrian comrades, and I implored them through every single person who went to Dachau to get me there. In the meantime a small women's hospital had been set up at Dachau Camp, for patients coming from the three women's working-parties. Everybody was put there—people with typhus, people with tuberculosis, and patients who had to undergo an operation. In the farthest corner

of the camp, next to the decontamination hut, there were a few rooms with central heating and a bathroom, which the men equipped, in preparation for the women prisoners, with a comfort of which we would hardly have dared to dream. It was like a pleasant, five-roomed flat, an oasis in the desert. To me it seemed the only possible salvation to creep into that corner and hide there; for the sake of the safety it offered I was even willing to go back behind the electrified wire. Also, there were no air raids on Dachau Camp.

I asked to be transferred there as a doctor, but I had no luck. In the end I reported sick—and I was really ill; no doctor near or far could have proved me wrong. I stayed in bed and asked either to be taken to the camp doctor at Dachau, or to be examined by him in Munich. In comparatively normal times I should not have brought it off, but in mid-February, 1945, everybody wanted at bottom what I wanted for myself—to be let alone. I was a liability to them, so that it seemed easiest to have me transferred and get rid of me, although the Commandant told me one evening in great fury: "Even if you stand on your head, you won't get to Dachau!" Whether it was that my Austrian friends worked successfully on my behalf, or whether the Dachau camp doctor had an attack of professional solidarity, or whether my young guardian angel intervened with Bach once more, I do not know. In any case, on the following day the medical N.C.O. of Dachau Camp arrived with an ambulance and fetched me to the Dachau Women's Hospital—the last station on my concentration camp road.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

DACHAU: END AND BEGINNING

LIFE IN a concentration camp was a chain of improvisations, and this applied to the medical side of it as well. The first case of ileus (twisting of the bowels) that occurred in our work-party was taken to a Munich hospital, but later acute cases for operation were sent to Dachau and put into a room of a men's sick ward, because it was decided that all prisoners must be treated within the camp. In the long run this arrangement did not prove satisfactory for women patients, and a small hospital for women was organised. There a young wardress kept us under supervision during the day. We were allowed to take our exercise in the narrow yard, which was separated from the rest of the camp by barbed wire. So we were a small concentration camp within the concentration camp, and sometimes I found this confinement in the small space and with a few people very oppressive in comparison with Auschwitz Camp. But in the end the separation was not very strict. We were allowed into the men's hospital to visit the dentist or for ultra-violet-ray treatment, while the doctors, a medical assistant who had the keys, and the men who carried the food came into our ward. There were other visits as well, fewer when the wardress was at her post, more numerous when she was absent, but on the whole she did not take her duty very seriously. We lacked nothing. We had sufficient food, and of a better quality also; for every national group in the camp gave some of its Red Cross food-parcels to the women prisoners. None of us went hungry and no one was cold. The men "organised" dresses and overcoats for us out of the stores, which were filled with clothing from the Auschwitz stock stolen from the Jews. We gaily began to cut, sew and fit clothes. I cannot believe that many women in Germany were similarly occupied at that time.

Bombs were crashing round us, hardly a day passed without an air raid on Munich or the near-by airfield of Schleissheim. In the men's camp a terrible typhus epidemic was raging, which even spread to our hut, and claimed one victim among us. Transports of prisoners from evacuated camps in the north and west began to pour into Dachau Camp. An uncanny nervousness gripped both Camp Command and prisoners. They devoured every newspaper; the break-through on the River Urft was successful, the West Wall

was passed—now it was true! But to us the war news came as though from the far distance, and news about developments in the men's camp sounded just as vague in our ears.

Occasionally information reached us, but the men did not want us to know too much. The S.S. had started hanging prisoners or killing them off by other means; some were released and transferred to the Army; the S.S. men were discussing what to do when the worst came to the worst. But we hardly realised it. One of the men said to me: "When the brothel girls came to Dachau we decided to boycott them. Not a single decent political prisoner went to them. But when you came, and we knew for the first time that real women were quite close to us, we were happy." They came to us for a brief talk, to forget, for a quarter of an hour, that they were in mortal danger. Therefore they did not want to speak of the problems which filled their minds, they did not want to worry us, and behaved as if there existed for us a normal life with normal interests, friendship and love.

This atmosphere of affectionate consideration, and the silence about the threatening dangers, calmed many of the women in the sick ward, who felt unbelievably safe in the care of their male comrades. Once, when I was profoundly depressed, an elderly Dutchwoman asked me why I felt as I did. I told her that I could not believe that the S.S. would let us escape alive, and that I did not see any possibility of protecting ourselves. She thought I was talking nonsense: "Things like that can't happen; one can't simply bump off thousands of people." (It was amazing that she still did not know that "one" might not be capable of it, but "they", the S.S., were only too capable!) She felt certain that everything would pass off peacefully; the Americans would come, the camp would be handed over to them, the Red Cross would take us home. It sounded very simple, and she thought it the most natural thing in the world. When events developed almost as she had predicted, she naïvely told me after the liberation: "There you are—why were you so afraid?" Even after the accomplished fact she had no inkling of the fate she had barely escaped, no inkling of the fact that only the courage and energy of our male comrades had averted the catastrophe. She was lucky. In those days she was spared much suffering—and, after all, there was no need for her to know about the things which might have happened. We women were condemned to utter passivity. All praise is due to the men who sacrificed themselves for us.

It was a strange idyll. These twenty-five women in the sick ward, who after a long time were allowed to be women again, formed a community linked by friendship, much less fraught with nervousness and hysteria than groups of women usually are,

because everyone had a man friend who cared personally for her and with whom she was more or less closely united. It was a recovery from the physical and mental strain of the preceding years. Those among us who were acutely ill were decently treated and nursed, the others could relax and recover. And all enjoyed things they had enjoyed formerly in their private lives, they laughed and joked—while they were closer to danger than ever before.

I myself was never quite able to forget about that danger, but even I could not shut out the kindly atmosphere. I made myself a sky-blue sun suit, studied a tome on neurology, re-read Goethe's *Wahlverwandtschaften* and his early poems. At first I was so exhausted that I slumped on my bed and slept most of the time. But slowly I began to eat meals again. In the beginning I was dominated by my worry about the strike affair; I wondered if my case would be shelved, or if a sentence from Berlin would fall on my guilty head, after all. I was told that the Dachau authorities themselves had decided to send me to Belsen Camp, together with the three women who had begun the strike and with a few sick women who were totally unfit for work; but the wardress who told me about it added at once to comfort me: "The transport won't come off, the railways are blocked, we can't get through." It was true. We were left where we were, and my petty case was lost in the whirl of events, which was fortunate for me. The S.S. people had other worries than our punishment.

The idea of going to Belsen did not frighten me much; I would have survived four weeks more even there—though I did not really know what Belsen was. In Auschwitz we had been told that Belsen was a "considerably better" camp, where Jews from neutral countries, especially Latin-America, were detained. Some pregnant women expecting their delivery were to be sent to Belsen from our Munich factory camp, on the grounds that "they would be well cared for there". As Auschwitz seemed to us the height of all possible horrors, we were perfectly willing to believe that other camps were somewhat better. There were even prisoners among the medical staff who volunteered for Belsen. Perhaps the S.S. people who told us the fairy tale of Belsen believed in it themselves. In Berlin and elsewhere, far from the spot, they used to repeat the story that Auschwitz was "all right", that there were thousands of beds in the camp hospital, lawns and flower-beds were being laid out, a prisoners' band was giving weekly concerts. Probably the Camp Command of Belsen made similar claims, and the Auschwitz S.S., believing they had a monopoly in lies, were ready to accept the story about the other

camp and to take the flower-beds (which really existed in most camps!) for the key-note of Belsen! We prisoners usually discounted 90 per cent. of whatever we were told, but did not quite reject the remaining 10 per cent. so that we fell into every new trap.

One day Herr Bach came into our sick ward at Dachau, because at the time he was courting the young wardress on duty there. When he saw me he pretended to be astonished and asked: "Oh, are you here? What's the matter with you? A nervous breakdown?" He went on: "I'll tell you something. This time you got off, but take my advice—I don't want to hear your name again. A second time I shan't let you scrape through. Anyhow, why did you do such a silly thing? Just when you would have had every chance of being released!"

I said: "No, Herr *Vernehmungsführer*, I know very well who will be released now and who won't, and I know that people of my sort won't be released before the end of the war. And after that we'll be free anyway!"

"You're quite wrong," he answered bitingly. "People of your sort and your ideas will still be in the concentration camp ten years after the end of the war."

I could not help smiling, but only said: "I'll risk that, Herr *Vernehmungsführer*."

The Allied troops had reached the Rhine! He gave me a look, bit his lips, turned round and walked away.

As I was really rather nervous, I asked our wardress once more if he would leave me in peace here.

"Don't worry; Bach won't do anything to you."

I was sceptical, especially since his affair with the beautiful blonde was obviously over, and insisted: "Why do you think so?"

Her answer was: "Because you impress him."

It astonished me, because I should have thought that he did not take me seriously, any more than any other woman.

As soon as I began to feel unimportant and calmed down, I came alive again and prepared myself for the tremendous tension of the finish. Towards the end of March the Camp Command suddenly prohibited all camp newspapers, which had been allowed until then, and ruled that no prisoners could stay without supervision in a room with a wireless set. We were overjoyed at the implications, and the men continued to receive the news, just the same through their channels. Our only worry was whether the Allied advance would continue, or whether the Rhine would cause a serious delay. When we heard the report of the crossing at Remagen, we were jubilant. Again I was the only prisoner with a German badge among Dutch and Polish women. It is a strange feeling

to be happy when war is coming into your own country: the Russians were drawing near my home, Vienna, and my husband's family was in Düsseldorf. . . . I envied my fellow-prisoners, whose joy was unclouded.

At that time I did not see much of the S.S. men. One night there was a search for arms in all the huts. Apparently they were afraid of a prisoners' rising and knew that the men were in touch with people outside the camp. Innumerable rumours circulated, and some of them seeped through to us. They centred on the three main possibilities for our immediate future: extermination—evacuation—surrender. The Danish and Norwegian prisoners had been fetched away in big white buses by the Swedish Red Cross; we could hardly believe that they had really left, and many set their hopes on this event, which was probably due to the courting of Swedish mediation by the Nazis. We heard tales of a conference of leading Dachau camp officials, when communications with Berlin were cut. One of them had proposed the wholesale extermination of the prisoners; it was said that he had been voted down by eighteen to seven. Yet, those seven would have been able to put the proposal into practice: it was not likely that they would be good enough democrats to submit to the majority vote. Then a new Camp Commandant was appointed—Martin Weiss, who had the reputation of having improved conditions in Dachau in 1942. This was a comforting fact. A Camp Police Force consisting of "reliable prisoners"—that is to say, of prisoners on whom the Camp Command felt it could rely—was set up, while the other prisoners were organising their own machinery for the taking over of the camp. Then came a blow: Himmler came to Munich to take over the city's defence, and we were within his reach. Ten of our friends among the men undertook to protect the women's hut. They were provided with pickaxes, and intended to break through a wall into a cellar, under the concrete ceiling of which we should be safe in an emergency. If the existing S.S. plan to destroy the hospital with flame-throwers had been carried out, we should probably have been asphyxiated in that cellar!

I often discussed our chances with a civil engineer from Vienna, who guarded the gate of our yard. He said, very reasonably: "Well, it all depends on whether the cowards come out on top, or the people with guts."

Vienna was free. The new Austrian Government had been formed. The British and American troops had joined up with the Russians. How many more days . . . ?

Sometimes I talked with our wardress about the end of the war. She was a crude young thing, but quite pretty and fresh—a

typical product of the Hitler Youth movement. Her father was a Munich tradesman, apparently a rather prudent sort of man.

"You know, I don't understand about politics," she said. "But one day we stopped our bikes near the Führer's Munich residence, and he happened to come out. He said a few words to us and shook hands with everyone, and he looked at us with his flashing eyes—it was marvellous!"

She and one of her girl friends had become S.S. Wardresses, because they had read an advertisement in the *Völkischer Beobachter* saying: "Healthy women and girls wanted for supervision of foreign workers." The two had thought that it would be a fairly easy job, in any case preferable to being called up for factory work. They had applied, undergone a physical examination, and were told that they would have to wear uniform and go through a training course in Mecklenburg. It turned out that the place in Mecklenburg was Ravensbrück Concentration Camp, and the uniform that of the S.S. They were not exactly pleased, but they did not mind. The girl's father pulled wires to get his daughter away from the horrible Prussians of Ravensbrück, and to the neighbouring indigenous horrors of Dachau; that was all.

When the young wardress went on duty in our hut she had to pass the heap of bodies, the victims of the typhus epidemic, piled in the hospital ground; she met the sick people—living skeletons—who swayed and crept to the treatment-room, and she was horrified. Then she came in contact with prisoners.

"You know," she said, "they told me it is very bad in Dachau; but they said only criminals and anti-social elements are there. But now, when I see you people—you're really quite nice, even the Poles—nice ladies and gentlemen!"

I asked her what she thought about the course of the war (the battle was still going on outside the West Wall).

"The Führer has promised us he's still got a new weapon. I think it will be used very soon now."

It was interesting to see how she relied on this. In her case the assurance lasted as long as the Allies occupied parts of Germany which she did not personally know. When Frankfurt-on-Main was taken, she was shaken. A great-aunt of hers lived in a little town near Frankfurt, and she once had spent a holiday with her. She imagined the old woman's little house in the market square, opposite the town hall. Now the American flag would wave from the spire, and her great-aunt would see American sentries every time she looked out of her window. It had become a reality to the girl that the enemy was in the heart of the Reich. Until then it had been a matter of politics, a matter for the men, which the Führer would deal with. Now it touched her as a person.

"No," she said, with tears in her eyes, "that's something the Führer oughtn't to have done."

"What do you mean?"

"He oughtn't to have said he's got something, if it just isn't true. And he's got nothing. Because if he's got something he would have used it now!"

Why just "now"? If her great-aunt had lived in Stalingrad or Rome, in Poznan or Aachen, the thought would have struck her at the corresponding time; as it was, her acquiescence had lasted till Frankfurt-on-Main.

"And what do you think now?" I inquired.

She quickly found new comfort: "Oh, well, an American officer wouldn't be so bad for a change!"

I did not know whether to wax indignant at her, or to laugh and appreciate the healthy instinct in her, which even the German Maidens' League had not stifled. Those young children had for years been told about the honour of the German woman, which was to be the mate of the German hero. They had heard it at school, in the Youth Organisations, in the Press, the theatre and the films. They had had a "crush" on the Führer's warriors and their uniforms, they had hated the vile Yankee who threatened his wonderful work. And while their eyes were still wet with the last tears shed for the Führer, they told themselves, very sensibly, that those Americans were gay, handsome lads—just as good for dancing and flirting as the S.S. men. They did not think that there was any good reason for them, individually, not to do as they liked. In fact, all those stories about being German and heroic had resounded in their ears as something which had nothing to do with their real life. In all probability there never were so few people inspired by a genuinely political creed in Germany as under National Socialism.

So this young wardress changed fronts. She got in touch with English prisoners of war in the camp—there were seven officers who were supposed to have worked for the Secret Service—and fell in love with one of them. So she gave away the whole evacuation plan of the S.S., including the marching orders and various other details, and offered to help some important prisoners to escape. Her father wrote a letter to a Dutch prisoner whom she particularly trusted, insisting on his daughter's complete innocence and imploring him to take her under his protection. The first time we heard the thunder of guns from the front, she fell on my neck and shouted: "They're coming, they're coming. . . ." At the last moment she asked her Dutch friend to make us give her prison clothes and hide her among us. He proposed it to us, but I did not like the idea. I found it too great a reward for a last-

minute change of mind. Yet it was not merely opportunism. She had felt a twinge of conscience all the time, but had repressed it. Now it was released, and, with the impulse of her twenty years, she surrendered herself to it, wanting to make up for the past.

In our ward there was a Jewess from Slovakia, a schizophrenic in an advanced stage, with a marked split-personality and incipient imbecility. In our hut she had been given a single room with running water—how I envied her! There she would stand the whole day long, at the barred window, singing over and over again the opening bars of a Jewish love song. Every time the camp doctor inspected the ward, he shrugged his shoulders and sighed: "What shall I do with her?" In the end he decided to try a shock treatment with cardiazol, although there was little point in it at that stage, and cardiazol was badly needed for the typhus patients. Three times she was subjected to the shock: then they took her away and killed her. We had seen so much evil, and were occupied with so many worries, that we were unable to get more excited about this case than about others.

But when the wardress was told she began to cry bitterly and stammered again and again: "But this is terrible, this is terrible. . . ." She could not understand how we, the prisoners, were not more deeply shaken.

In the end I was almost sorry for her and stroked her hair. "You're a poor silly girl," I said, and she looked gratefully at me. But when I asked her the next morning to take me to the diathermic station, she refused it, very conscious of her position and authority and said:

"No, there you only talk with the French doctor, and I can't understand what you say. That doesn't suit me."

I was not angry with her, I would never have done her any harm, and wished her well—only the prison clothes were too good for her, I felt.

The first to arrive were not the Americans, but the mass transports of prisoners from evacuated camps. They came in thousands, utterly exhausted after many days' marching, practically without food, in rags, barefooted or in clogs, their feet covered in blisters and festering sores. There was no room and no food for them in Dachau. Many camped in the open. They could not keep down the soup they were given, and died like flies. I had become used to much in Auschwitz, but even there I had hardly seen anything like those prisoners who had been driven senselessly from one camp to the other. Then came a few hundred women prisoners, who were quartered in the former camp brothel, as soon as its inmates had been evacuated to our old factory camp in Munich. Those were wild days. Nobody knew if he would live

to see the next morning. Also the male prisoners were greatly excited by the arrival of those healthy women—in our hut there were, after all, only patients.

Then the news came that all men would be evacuated, with the exception of the sick. There were about 7,000 patients unfit for transport in the camp. The report was half true: only the Germans and Russians had to go. I had a good friend, a doctor who was an officer in the Red Army. He had escaped from a Stalag and had been sent to Dachau. Like myself, he was a great admirer of the French language. We used to sit on the ledge of the bath in our ward, listen to the roar of the guns, read Baudelaire's poetry, and feel very close to one another. Now he was to depart. Those men were to be taken to a new camp in the Oetzthal in Tirol, presumably as hostages. I knew the region well from winter sports, and drew him a map which showed him an escape route to peasants, friends of mine, in the Gschnitzthal. The transports formed up in the parade square, ready for departure, but half of the men ran away and hid in the huts. Camp discipline had broken down, and even many of the S.S. had lost their zeal. My friend, too, got away, was able to hide, and sent me word that he was safe. The prisoner-functionaries and some of the S.S. sabotaged the evacuation. All the same, 6,000 men were driven away on what came to be called the death march. Most of them died.

We women heard only incomplete and fragmentary reports of it. In those days I was very busy, for 250 women who had marched from Saxony to Dachau—a march of fourteen days—were in a terrible state, and had to be bandaged.

Then, on the morning of Sunday, April 29th, white flags were hoisted on the towers and the S.S. disappeared from the camp. An international committee of prisoners took over the direction. Our wardress came running into our hut in tears, hugged the women and fled. She must have known that a detachment of selected S.S. men stood ready for the annihilation of the camp.

At five in the afternoon, when I was sitting in the former camp brothel bandaging one lacerated foot after the other, I heard shooting outside, and then loud cries of joy. With a comrade from Vienna who happened to be near I ran to the parade square—the gates stood open, and the first American soldiers were coming in. We were saved, after all.

Only later did I hear about the true course of events. I still do not know all the facts. They may have been described more exactly and authoritatively by others. What I heard was that the Commandant had opposed the extermination of the remaining prisoners and had been shot and wounded by his subordinate,

Ruppert. When Ruppert then proceeded to put the devilish plan into practice, the political prisoners went into action. The camp was strictly closed, and not even the working parties left it; only a few Russians had to go outside the precincts with the so-called "Moor-Express" (the big, heavy waggons pulled by prisoners) to fetch vital foodstuffs from the stores. Forty prisoners, most of them German political prisoners who had fought in Spain, disguised themselves as Russians, and so managed to get out. Previously they had got in touch with a resistance group built up by a former inmate of the concentration camp within the official Dachau "Volkssturm". A rising was staged in the town, the insurgents occupied the town hall, and it took the S.S. a whole day to suppress the revolt and restore "law and order". Most of the forty lost their lives. But they had tied down the forces of the S.S. during the very last day, when they could have carried out their extermination work. Two of those brave men, who knew every stone and footpath in the neighbourhood, made their way to the American Eighth Army and reported on the plight of the 30,000 prisoners in Dachau, who were facing death. The Americans, who had probably planned a pincer movement on Munich, at once sent a forward tank detachment to the camp.

As the Americans approached the camp, a few crazed S.S. men fired on them from the towers upon which they had hoisted the white flag, but their resistance was quickly overcome. Its only result was that all of them, even those who were running away with hands raised, were shot down. For a few days the bodies of the killed S.S. men lay about the camp, and then eventually the evil spook disappeared. Slowly we awoke to the knowledge that we were free—truly free. But some took a long time to grasp what this meant. For many it was fortunate that they had to wait in the camp a few weeks before going home, just as men working in caissons are protected by spending some time in high-pressure chambers before coming to the surface. At first we were both happy and apathetic. But it was true: we were free.

Many prisoners left the camp on the day after the entry of the American troops. They left it on foot, in vehicles they had "organised", without permission, somehow, anyhow—anything to get home. They were the least disciplined among the prisoners, but also perhaps those who had suffered the least mental damage through life in the camp. They felt the craving to start real life anew, to get back to their families and their work. Nothing could keep them back, nothing slow them down. Once back home, many of them worked energetically and conscientiously for the repatriation of those who had stayed on in the camp—a task

which was neither simple nor easy. They founded the first committees from which the Associations of Concentration Camp Prisoners developed. They were the first to tell a startled world about the unimaginable happenings in the camps. On the other hand, some of them found themselves in difficult situations, especially those who had to cross frontiers and wander about without papers, ration coupons or even money; they found some help among the population, but sometimes they were turned away by suspicious people who had had bad experiences with criminal ex-prisoners or persons who had posed as political victims.

Their sad fate was often quoted to us by our representatives during the weeks after the camp had been taken over by the American Military Government, when we began to be impatient at the constant postponement of our return home.

A certain number of prisoners stayed in the camp because they were afraid of that sort of complication. A great number stayed because they were sick and unfit for transport. Others stayed out of a sense of discipline. But with many individuals, in all these groups, other motives counted in their remaining, and even caused it. One of those motives was a desire, which may seem childish, to settle accounts on the spot and at last organise the camp according to old, hitherto frustrated, ideas. Another motive was a faint fear of the return into an ardently desired life.

During the first days it was one of my greatest joys that I could have a room of my own in the women's hospital, and invite friends for a glass of wine. And that I no longer had to ask the permission of the stupid chief medical assistant when I wanted to leave the yard. And other small things of the kind. Once, five English officers, who had installed themselves in a beautiful S.S. house in the outskirts of the camp, invited me to a dinner, with several courses and various wines. When I sat in a leather armchair, smoking a cigarette, with a glass of gin before me, I thought I had returned to the height of civilised life, and felt so gay, so animated, that I was not even conscious of the fact that I had not left the concentration camp. Days passed before I asked for a safe-conduct which entitled me to leave the camp, more days before I asked friends to take me to Munich. And the first time I walked on the sunny road to the little town of Dachau, accompanied by a friend, not in a group, without supervision, there was only one circumstance which astonished me: that this seemed so natural, and that all the same it did not enter my mind to stay outside the camp. In the evening it was just as natural to me to go "home"—to the concentration camp.

Those of the Americans who had not seen other concentration camps before were just as aghast at the sight of Dachau as the

British were at the sight of Belsen. The corpses, the sick people, the half-starved, the ferocious young men who pounced upon the stores of the camp and its surroundings; the various national groups, with their mushroom organisations, their thousand particular demands, their solidarity, and their feuds; the whole wild, released, emaciated, starved mass; the sensible "functionaries"—it must have added up to a fantastic vision. With a speed and energy surprising in the circumstances, the American Military Government, in collaboration with the International Prisoners' Committee, achieved a great work of organisation. The prisoners' food was secured, clothing and footwear distributed, the repatriation planned and prepared. The camp region of Dachau was put under typhus quarantine, large-scale decontamination carried through, a field hospital for 7,000 patients installed in the former S.S. barracks, with German prisoners of war working as doctors and German nurses. The care of the sick was one of the most urgent problems, because the typhus epidemic was still raging and had spread to the groups of evacuated prisoners who had arrived in Dachau worn out by their hunger marches and without power of resistance, so that they succumbed in masses to the disease. The American Army doctors shouldered the greatest part of the task.

In so far as the old hospital building was still in use and even re-organised, an old conflict was fought out, after years of secret smouldering. It was caused by the interesting problem of the authority of the specialist, a problem I had met in another form in Auschwitz, where it had been solved in favour of the doctors, in contrast to Dachau.

While the concentration camp served only for the extermination of the prisoners, the imprisoned doctors were put to work in the fields and on the moor, while the medical service was carried out by chemists, medical assistants, or other prisoners who had an inclination or talent in that direction. I was told that in Dachau Camp a mechanic had done 400 operations for appendicitis. Often the men who volunteered for this work were excellent types. They did a wonderful job in the service of their sick comrades, borne up by devotion and good will. Most of them had very little training, hardly more than a course of first aid in one of the workers' organisations. They built up a hospital out of nothing, always exposed to the gravest danger of infection. Then, in 1942, the S.S. began to commercialise the camps for the purposes of war industry. They followed the principle of "transporting"—that is, gassing—those who were definitely unfit for work, but at the same time procuring efficient medical help for the curable prisoners with the greatest possible speed. Commandant Weiss of Dachau,

who carried through this reform, fetched the doctors back from the working parties and put them into the hospitals for prisoners. This produced a fierce struggle between them and the "chief medical assistants", who also were the Hut Seniors. These clever, capable, but often rather self-assured men were justly proud of their achievements, and did not feel like subordinating themselves to the doctors. The doctors, in their turn, were justly disinclined to let laymen interfere with their work.

Certainly there were doctors among the prisoners who were not very good at their job, but many others found that their life was made cruelly difficult; they had to go short of food, clothing and sleeping accommodation, until their working stamina was lowered and it could be said with apparent truth that "the intellectuals had failed".

In the Dachau women's hospital I had been authorised by the camp doctor to do medical work, and was on duty together with a Russian colleague, in the closest co-operation with him. Even I came to feel something of the curious relationship between the doctors and medical assistants. Our chief assistant decided which patient was well enough to be released; he decided whether it was necessary to call in a specialist or not (he had a prejudice in favour of surgical treatment, but was against internal treatment), he passed judgment on whether a prognosis was correct or not. In his view diagnoses of non-typical or abortive symptoms were always wrong, because he knew only typical symptoms. This attitude infuriated us, the doctors. It demanded a great amount of self-control to understand and forgive it, recognising it as a development of the prisoner-hospital, and also as a result of the justifiable mistrust of those self-confident workers who had mainly met Fascist university graduates. But as a great percentage of the chief assistants were Germans or Austrians, while many foreign doctors were active members of resistance movements, and anything but Fascists, the latter felt extremely indignant. Now, after the liberation, they could rid themselves of that particular tyranny. At last they were able to conduct the hospital, if only for a few weeks, as they had always wanted to. They were proud and glad of their hospital at a time when it was coming to an end.

Other old conflicts were being fought out then. On the formation of the International Committee the Austrian prisoners had not been present, but they were very soon invited to take part. The German prisoners were invited a day later, on the insistent recommendation of part of the foreign comrades. But not all had been in favour of the invitation, and the insistence had been very necessary. At that time Dachau was practically a non-German

camp. The great majority of the German and Austrian prisoners had been sent away on the "death march", the remainder were a small, numerically insignificant group. But among them were men who had been imprisoned since 1933, because they had put their anti-Fascist conviction to the test even then. They behaved with quiet dignity, and did not try to push themselves into the foreground. Various German Capos were denounced by their former fellow-prisoners and sent to the prison cell pending an investigation: in some cases it was justified, in others not, because behaviour which the prisoner might have felt to be an intolerable oppression was often due to the infinitely precarious half-way position of the Capos.

Many members of other national groups laid great store on being made prisoner-functionaries at the last moment, and some would throw their weight about. On the door of the library a poster was fixed, which announced the times for the changing of books in all the camp languages: first English, then all the other European languages, last but one Albanian (since there were five Albanian prisoners in the camp), and last German. It was a detail, a rather petty detail, and it was so understandable that the contrary would have been surprisingly generous. The main point—also the point which distinguished this procedure from the previous S.S. procedure!—was that the library consisted almost without exception of good German books, and that nobody dreamed of removing them.

Yet what happened in Dachau Camp after the liberation was certainly not an international fraternising among people who had suffered together. This led one of the American officers to the rueful exclamation "I fear we Americans have fought this war for Europe in vain; you're just the same as before." The prevailing tendency was for people to retire into their national groups and to enjoy the restored freedom within its limits. Every national group set up its new quarters somewhere within the quarantined area, in the houses and barracks of the S.S., published periodicals and organised small festivals. The most showy mass function was organised by the Poles under the direction of their officers and priests, the most artistically attractive show was given by the Russians, with grotesque dancers whom everyone would have taken for professionals and with stirring recitals by a highly cultured young poet. The Germans had a serious, rather heavy hour in memory of the dead, and the Austrians a cabaret show with a professional actor as witty compère.

In the day-time the old game of "organising" went on in grand style; everybody wanted to take home as much as he could, since nobody knew whether he would find anything left there. The

Americans did not like it, for they feared the spreading of infectious diseases throughout the country, but they tolerated it. It was incredible what quantities of goods the S.S. had accumulated in Dachau. There were dresses, cloth, linen sheets, crockery, china; a hall the size of a riding school was filled with perfumery goods, toilet lotions, skin foods and so forth; there were wines and champagne—those people had supplies for many more years of war.

Innumerable reporters visited the camp. I did not like it much when I heard one of the male nurses say for the tenth time in the tone of a guide: "And here you see the foot-irons in which the lunatics were locked during the night." But the pressmen were honestly moved and showed a warm, active sympathy for the victims of the system. They really attempted to understand what had happened in the place, so as to tell the world about it, although it is unlikely that anyone will ever quite understand it who did not go through it himself.

The officers of the C.I.C. took statements and asked for reports on every detail. One of them came to me and asked if I would be willing to give a description of the physical maltreatment I had suffered in the concentration camp, and to sign the statement with my full name. I agreed, but added that I certainly could tell many terrible things, but had not been maltreated myself in the narrow sense of the word. The officer looked at me in surprise and doubt, as though wondering whether I had any reason for protecting the S.S., or whether I was, after all, not a genuine prisoner. I felt almost ashamed. But then he thanked me and left without putting anything on paper. I should have thought it better if he had noted down: So-and-so many prisoners state that they were physically maltreated, so-and-so many state that they escaped without manhandling. The number of those who had suffered bodily maltreatment would still have been large enough, the overall picture would still have been horrifying enough—and perhaps it would have been somewhat nearer to the truth.

The Austrian prisoners, approximately 350, had been allotted a decent building, but it was too small. At the back of it was the so-called Kaffir-kraal: primitive road-workers' huts from the stores of the "Organisation Todt", set up on the four sides of a square lawn. With five other Austrian women, I moved into one of those huts. It was definitely my last abode in the concentration camp. There we led quite a merry life, reminiscent of a scouts' camp.

Naturally we were feverishly waiting for our repatriation. The seven weeks I lived in camp after the liberation seemed never-

ending. "You can't leave yet, the demarcation lines for Austria haven't been fixed." We did not quite see why this should make our departure impossible: if I am at home in a village, I'm at home there, whether it turns out to be situated in the British or the Russian zone. . . . "Would you prefer the Russians to stay in Vienna all by themselves, or do you want the British and Americans to go there as well?" Most of us avoided giving a direct answer. There was not much we really wanted in those days. We only longed to be home, we thought with sorrow of the parting from our camp-companions, we made plans for the future, and we were a little afraid of their failure—or of their realisation.

And finally the day came when the head of an Austrian self-aid organisation told me: "I've got room in the 'bus for you; you can come with us now, and won't have to wait for the other Austrians in Dachau. In three days you'll be with your child."

I could not thank her. I could not say a word.

A brief good-bye, and I got into the bus that was to take me back to a life from which I had for so long been an outcast. Would life take me back?